

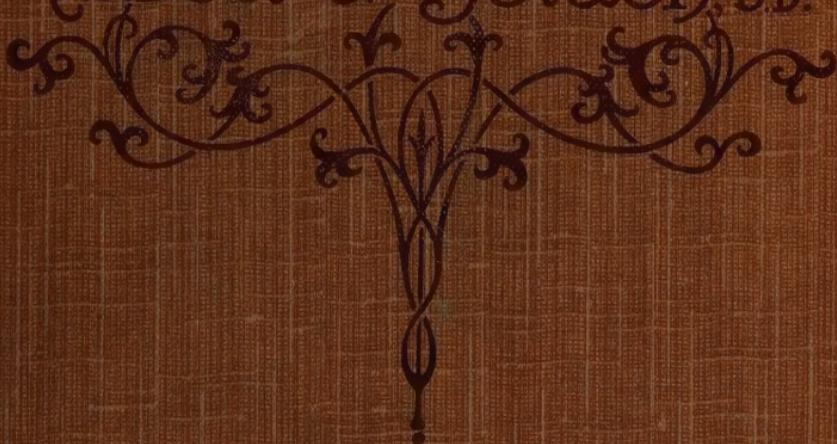
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Does God really care?

By
Albert D. Belden, B.D.





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DOES GOD REALLY CARE?

ESSAYS OF
CHALLENGE AND COMFORT

BY

ALBERT D. BELDEN, B.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE SOUL'S APPEAL TO GOD"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
PRINCIPAL THE REV. A. E. GARVIE, M.A., D.D.

AND A PREFATORY POEM BY
JOHN OXENHAM

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A NEW EARTH

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

*GOD grant us wisdom in these coming days,
And eyes unsealed, that we clear visions see
Of that new world that He would have us build,
To Life's ennoblement and His high ministry.*

*God give us sense,—God-sense of Life's new needs,
And souls afame with new-born chivalries—
To cope with those black growths that foul the ways,—
To cleanse our poisoned founts with God-born energies.*

*To pledge our souls to nobler, loftier life,
To win the world to His fair sanctities,
To bind the nations in a Pact of Peace,
And free the Soul of Life for finer loyalties.*

*Not since Christ died upon His lonely cross
Has Time such prospect held of Life's new birth;
Not since the world of chaos first was born
Has man so clearly visaged hope of a new earth.*

By kind permission of the Author.

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INTRODUCTION

IT is with great pleasure that I comply with the request of my friend and former student, the author of this volume, that I should write a brief introduction, for a teacher's heart is made glad by the discovery that one whom he has taught has himself become apt to teach.

Both as regards contents and form, the book deserves my cordial commendation. It contains many a word fitly written for times such as these. The shadow of the Great War has been cast over the writer, but he has looked steadily to the sunshine of the Christian faith, and the brightness his volume reflects will relieve the darkness of many a heart.

The problems of the day are fully and frankly faced, and their sole and sufficient solution is presented as in Christ, and Christ alone. The exposition is simple, and in the best sense of the word, popular; but the substance of the thought is not shallow.

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The writer has read and thought to good purpose, and he has felt as well as thought ; there is the warmth of love as well as the light of truth.

He has followed what I believe to be the right method of theology. He has not depended on proof-texts as the basis of statement, but has applied, reverently and intelligently, the central truth of the Gospel—the love of God the Father in the grace of Christ the Son—to the problems with which he has dealt ; and he has reached solutions with which I find myself almost entirely in accord, and which I am confident will bring help and comfort to many a reader.

ALFRED E. GARVIE.

NEW COLLEGE, LONDON,

March 1920.

PART I

CHALLENGE

I

THE WORLD-VISION OF THE REDEEMER

THAT beautiful and moving prayer, recorded in the 17th of St. John, more truly called the Lord's Prayer than the one He gave for His disciples' use, presents us with three concentric circles of thought.

First there is the one great centre, Christ Himself, then a circle inclusive of His first and immediate disciples, "those whom Thou hast given me." The movement of His prayer then passes out to "those who shall believe through their word"—the Church that is to be—and, finally, it expands to the widest circle of all "that *the world* may believe." The prayer moves from the One Redeemer, through the One Church, to the One World.

Now as one realises this movement of

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Christ's prayer it is difficult to avoid the conviction that here we have not only the motion of Christ's thought, but the inevitable *programme of Christ in history*. If Jesus thinks in this way, if He prays in these stages, it is because to His superlative mind they are the lines of natural and inevitable sequence from His redemptive thought to His redemptive achievement. We see, for example, that without any doubt "the world" and nothing less is Christ's goal. He is out for absolute world - dominion, and the toleration of any smaller aim than that is disloyalty to His vision and His programme.

The Vision of the Redeemer is World-wide

It is a great advantage to the Christian Church to find that fact clearly stated. It is almost inconceivable that it could ever have been doubted. Yet we know how for generations in Christian history the idea obtained that Christ's purpose was to select from the world a little elect company who should be rendered sure of heaven, damnation being the fate of the rest. We also know how there are still Christian Churches that have no interest beyond their own borders;

which fail utterly to share the World-Vision of the Redeemer ; whose interest in the work of Christ beyond the seas is meagre and perfunctory at the best. They are little religious clubs—self-centred, enjoyable, easy, happy, but small, oh ! so small and hopelessly short-sighted. Now this prayer rescues the Church from such pettiness and myopia.

The fact, too, that here we find this great Vision whispered in prayer should render it doubly sacred. Have you ever overheard your mother's prayers for you ? If so you know how those noble aspirations of hers came home to your heart with tenfold force, as you heard them whispered so passionately and pleadingly into the ear of Almighty God. Even so, here is Jesus praying for "the world" ; and we need not wonder that St. John, writing in his old age, cannot forget that prayer he overheard, so that when he writes "He is the propitiation for our sins," he cannot refrain from adding "and not for ours only but for *all the world*."

Moreover, this prayer reflects the constant outlook of the Redeemer. The very first testimony borne to Him was in these same

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wide terms, "Behold the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world." Hear His own words, "I came not to condemn the world, but that *the world* might be saved." "I, if I be lifted up, will draw *all men* unto Me." "*Go ye into all the world*, and preach the gospel to *every creature*."

Can we as followers of Jesus fail to follow Him here? Can we indulge a lesser hope and a meaner outlook, and be worthy of Him? Is it possible that Christians can sink to the level of the old Jewish prejudice which regarded God as a monopoly of one nation, and was jealous of the religious aspirations of other people? We are shocked at the blasphemy which can speak of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as "the good old German God"—yet how many of us in our thought and vision are sharing Christ with all the world? Nothing less than world-vision is worthy of the Church of the World-Redeemer. His Love is without "respect of persons."

Never was to chosen race
That unstinted tide confined ;
His is every time and place,
Fountain sweet of heart and mind.

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This World-Vision should be easier in our day

In a real sense this planet is being rounded up into a vast "gathering of nations," closer and more pregnant with possibilities than anything the world has known before.

Any one who realises what is actually happening cannot escape the feeling that the supreme crisis of human history is almost at hand. The poles of the earth are discovered ; there can scarcely be any tribe on the earth unknown and uncounted, and by visible and invisible bonds of communication they are being brought closer and closer together. It impresses me as akin to no picture so much as that which the New Testament draws for us, of the nations assembling before the throne of the Son of Man. There humanity stands—one world—one people—awaiting judgment. Is Christ going to succeed in uniting them—or will the devil succeed in blasting and breaking this vast assembly back into the chaotic separateness of barbarism ? Are the nations to meet for mutual brotherhood, or for mutual plunder and strife ? This great approach of nations to each other—this

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world in spate—this rushing together of peoples by telegraph and steamboat and press and locomotive is volcanic with vast possibilities, both explosive and cohesive. This is the One World at last which the One Redeemer foresaw. Consider the following facts—a selection from a vast array.¹

A century ago it took Robert Morrison several months to reach China, which was almost a closed land. Just previous to the War our railway companies were advertising “to China in a fortnight.”

It is said that pictures of Hankow are indistinguishable from pictures of Sheffield or Birmingham or Düsseldorf—so similar are industrial conditions now.

So close is the present connection between East and West, that promising Christian movements in Japan and elsewhere have been seriously checked by the evidence of the failure of Christendom to prevent poverty and slums, and achieve a more just distribution of wealth.

There is a Japanese problem in America, Vancouver, and Australia ; a Hindu problem in South Africa ; a Chinese problem even in

¹ See *The Great Embassy*, by Cuthbert M'Evoy.

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London ; whilst British Guiana presents, since the importation of labour from the British West Indies, the spectacle of the Moslem mosque erected beside the Christian chapel, and little Moslem and Christian children playing side by side in the streets.

The presence of large numbers of Eastern students of all faiths at the universities of Europe is bringing what were before remote "isms" home to our very doors, so that in London a man may literally make his choice of any faith in "Comparative religion" ; whilst the large development of Western commerce in the Eastern world is taking more and more of our European stock into the heart of heathendom.

It should be, then, no great difficulty in face of these facts—in face of the world, on your breakfast-table every morning, wrapped in a newspaper—to share the World-Vision of Him Who loves all peoples with equal love.

What is to be the result of this great "gathering of the nations"—of these tightening cords of relationship ? More and more we are bound in a common sheaf. Is it for heaven's garner of love, or for hell's

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burning of hate ? Already voices are raised for a League of the Nations—this is the quintessence of the wisdom of statesmen ; but two thousand years ago Christ saw the world as One Great League of Humanity and taught His disciples to revere it as such. The world's wisdom is all anticipated in Jesus.

Do we not feel that Christ must conquer now or be finally rejected ? The hour is fraught with the destiny of a world. Where stands the Church ?

A World-Church

So we come to Christ's great and solemn demand upon His Church. For there is no escaping the awful significance of His argument in this sacred prayer. *He stakes His success upon the unity of His people.* They are to be the cement of the One World. Gathered out of every nation—they are to hold the nations together. By their insistent World-Vision — by their invincible Christian love bridging all differences of race and clime and distance and custom they are to be the solid core, round which the new world shall become one globe indeed.

A Christian International

In Christ's view, the League of Nations must be preceded by the League of Churches. In other words, only by the unity of all lovers of Christ from amongst every people, can nations ever be welded into a real Society of Love and become a league of enduring and unburdened and willing peace. The Church and the world are alike being forced to realise that missionary enterprise reflects the soundest statesmanship as well as the truest religion. Do we of the Churches trust our Master's vision? We profess to follow His lead. Do we follow it here? What urgency it puts into the question of church unity—into the rapid production of a new sympathy between Romanist and Protestant, Greek, Anglican, and Free Churchman—into the task of rearing a *Christian International* which, because founded on the Eternal Rock of Ages, shall be strong enough to stand every blast of human prejudice and lust of war! *The best support the Churches can give to the League of Nations is for them immediately to organise their own World-Unity.*

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Yet still there are people in our ranks who can dismiss such hopes by a use of brave Sir Thomas More's great word "Utopia" that would surely have broken his heart. Dare any man called Christian assert that Jesus was wrong ? Utopian ! Visionary ! Who will utter the blasphemy ?

Oh ! the little hearts that know not how to believe ! The Master prays for the coming of the Great Day when "the world shall believe" and the "world shall know"; the day foretold by the Apostle of the Gentiles, when "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Him!"

Does He pray for the Impossible ?

Must we not share His vision and the great universal Love which alone is worthy of the vision ? Could we but keep that vision of the World made One in Christ sufficiently before us we could no longer brook our present petty differences and cleavages—prejudices would be consumed in the blaze of passion for the ideal. We must lift our eyes to this world-view and believe that Christ's hope is justified. We must learn of the Redeemer Himself,—surely He who was

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so right in everything else cannot be wrong here. Perish all small views, all merely national and denominational restrictions of outlook. The Church of the World's One Redeemer *must* become the One Church of the One World.

II

CAESAR AND GOD

A Re-Interpretation

SOME sayings of Jesus are absolute in their nature. They can stand by themselves without risk of being misunderstood. They carry an invariable and unmistakable meaning, and have a value for all generations and occasions. Such sayings, for example, as, "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you," "Love your enemies," "Be not anxious," "Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth." Although in such cases the context is always enlightening, yet it is not actually indispensable.

There are other sayings of our Lord, however, which can only be lifted out of their context at the great risk of losing their meaning entirely. Such an instance is provided by Christ's reply concerning the tribute

money—"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

It is not too much to say that the habit of using this word of Christ's apart from its context has led actually to the complete *reversal* of its meaning as it fell from His lips. *As an isolated motto this verse has been used to sanction a false spirituality, utterly obnoxious to the spirit of Jesus.* It has been used to support that point of view which shuts human life up into water-tight compartments, having no relations one with another, which says this is secular, that is sacred; this is politics, that is religion; this is business, that is morality; and which is prepared to use two differing codes of conduct for those respective activities.

This point of view produces those peculiar people who can profess a lively interest in God, and in His Son, and yet be as fierce as sharks in business, and as devious as serpents in politics; who can worship the King of Love with ostentation on Sunday and serve the creed of competition with perfect hardness all the rest of the week.

Such people love this text, "They roll it

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under their tongue as a sweet morsel"; they give you the impression that Jesus never said anything else, and they find here complete sanction for yielding to Caesar all he asks for, even though it means that God goes short. So doing they prove how utterly they have failed to grasp the Lord's meaning in these words.

↙ A careful inquiry into the context of this saying will show that the generally accepted idea that Jesus here permits a separation of the things of Caesar from those of God is actually the reverse of the truth. ↘

What then did Jesus mean ?

↙ The Pharisees and Herodians each took opposite views of what the relation of the Jews should be to the Roman power.

The Herodians were prepared to accept the compromise of Roman rule, through some representative of the house of Herod. They indulged a veiled opposition both to the Roman procuratorship and to the more distinctive Jewish ideal of a pure theocracy. They were willing to compromise their national ideal for political aims.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, pro-

fessed to believe in theocracy. Israel's only King was Jehovah, Caesar was a usurper. They paid much lip-homage to this idea, yet they did not openly raise the standard of revolt, but bore themselves submissively to their oppressors, and were nothing loath to use Caesar's coinage and benefit by other advantages of Roman rule.

A Position of Compromise.

Neither party occupied a frank, honest position. Their attitude was shot through and through with compromise and pretence and hypocrisy. Still more hypocritical was their alliance in the effort to trick Jesus into an expression of opinion about the tribute money, which would embroil Him either with the authorities or with the people. Their position, already dishonest, was doubly false as they approached Jesus. They sought no genuine solution of their national difficulty ; they did not mind being left to their own opinions so long as they could induce Jesus to commit Himself. If Jesus should sanction the paying of tribute money, the people would be offended. If He should refuse to sanction it, the authorities would have a

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handle against Him. This was the crafty dilemma prepared for Our Lord.

The wisdom of the answer Jesus gave, when it is seen in all its beauty and power, pulls one up sharply with a sense of awe and a deep reverence for that matchless mind. We always find delight in seeing villainy foiled, but surely nowhere in history is there to be found an answer to a question of guile, at once so straightforward for the honest and discerning and so ambiguous for the insincere. Jesus staggers them with a reply which, superficially viewed, suits both *Caesar* and *God* and delights the people. Let us look at the reply carefully.

Which things are Caesar's?

“ Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.” Now what precisely is the meaning of that sentence? The Pharisees and Herodians didn't know. The people didn't know, although they shrewdly guessed.

The whole point is that it is an *utterly ambiguous remark*. Our traditional view of the text obscures this fact. The word translated “render” is a word meaning simply “give-back,” “restore,” and as such is

applicable of course to the idea of paying tribute.

If, however, it was clear that Jesus meant "pay tribute" by the words, *it is highly singular that the Pharisees did not seize upon His sanction and hold Him up to the displeasure of the multitude.* Instead we find the Pharisees silent and the people delighted! Why? Because the Pharisees could not tell what He meant, whereas the people seized on the simplest significance of the words and understood Jesus to mean—"Give back to Caesar *all* that is Caesar's!" "Give it back to him! Refuse to have anything to do with Caesar! Don't soil your hands and honesty by using his coinage at all! Refuse to touch it! Give back to Caesar whatever is Caesar's!" They had just confessed that it was Caesar's coinage. Bearing his image, it was the symbol of their subjection. Yet they were secretly his foes. Christ's reply, whilst its form was one with which they could find no fault, might just as well have meant "*Fling* back to Caesar these symbols of his oppression and of your dependence."

This was the people's understanding of the words undoubtedly, although Christ's

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actual meaning was obviously " Be honest, be genuine, don't deny God in your own soul. If you *feel* Caesar's rule is wrong, say so." " Give up the things of Caesar."

Thus He cut through their smug hypocrisy and complacency and hugely delighted the people, who were shrewd enough to see through the mean ruse of the questioners.

No Things not God's

" And unto God, the things that are God's." Probably the Pharisees and Herodians might have stopped to ask Jesus what precisely He meant by " Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's " if it had not been for this second sentence, which, I imagine, fell from the lips of Jesus at a white-heat of moral indignation. One can see the form of Jesus dilating terribly in moral passion whilst He spoke these words, as when He hurled out of the Temple them that sold therein.

There is no doubt here, either for Pharisees or people, as to His meaning. Nor for us. He means that if only they had been right with God there would never have been any doubt in their minds regarding their duty to Caesar. Their difficulty arises solely from

their falsity to God and His moral law. Their duty is to be *simply genuine and honest* whether they pay tribute or do not. If they render unto God His dues they will not fail in their duty to Caesar, whether that duty be to oppose him or to serve him. As Paul put it at a later time, “*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*” So that we see emerging from the story, not the lesson of the separateness of the things of Caesar and the things of God, *but the lesson of their solemn and close relation.*

By the phrase “*things of Caesar*” more, of course, can be meant than simply the coinage that bears Caesar’s superscription. All affairs of State, the life of commerce, of the home, of international politics, all those interests that we so commonly and yet mistakenly speak of as secular and temporal. These things can never be rightly adjusted to the soul, until the soul is right with God.

There is nothing more obvious about the teaching of Our Lord than that He saw life as a grand whole—all of a piece, a delicate mosaic of inter-relations, a closely woven network of mutual dependencies. *For Him there were no things that were not God’s.* He denied most strenuously the possibility of

our being able to serve God *and* Mammon, or of being able to pursue one code of morality in dealing with men and another in dealing with God. On the contrary, He taught that the soul's divine opportunity of serving God was to be found in the right use of the daily and commonplace things of life.

The final judgment of God upon our conduct will not fall upon our observance of the Lord's day, or of the forms of worship, but upon such things "of Caesar" as the distribution of our food to the hungry, our clothes to the ill-clad, our practical sympathy to the outcast and the criminal. What could be more common than water? Turned on from a tap, so many shillings a quarter! How prosaic! Yet the giving of a cup of water may bring a soul into the holy service of God.

Jesus is insistent that we cannot sustain right relations with our earthly environment unless we seek God first. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things shall be added unto you."

Denying God in Business

The Christian, therefore, of all persons, can least tolerate artificial distinctions between

his service of God and of men, between religion and politics, morality and business, foreign policy and the rule of Christ. Just as he is one man, with one heart and one mind and one will, moving through the varied spheres of life, so as one man he is responsible in all those varied spheres of interest and activity, to the One true and only God. You cannot deny God in business and be acceptable to Him in Church ; you cannot serve tyranny and unjust privilege with your vote and pray the acceptable prayer ; you cannot tolerate in the embassies of the world the spirit of war and pose as the promoters on earth of the rule of the Prince of Peace.

The author of *As Tommy sees Us*—a very searching book for the people and ministry of the Churches—tells a delightful story illustrating the practical impossibility of the attempt to sever the things of Caesar from the things of God. A distinguished bishop, he says, was also, as bishops frequently were in past days, a distinguished soldier. But when soldiering he was also a distinguished swearer. When rebuked for the bad habit, he tried to excuse himself upon the plea that he swore as a soldier and not as a bishop.

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His questioner immediately replied, " But when the soldier goes to hell, where then will the bishop be ? "

It is a fair question. We know that plea all too well. " As a citizen," we say, " not as a member of Christ's Church ! " Thus we palter with our loyalty to Christ and land ourselves in problems that would never arise for souls who were utterly loyal to Christ in all circumstances and in every sphere. Would we but always " render unto God the things that are God's " we should never be in doubt as to our duty regarding Caesar.

Is God ruling in our life ? Are our affairs being organised for His victory ? We dare not be faithful to Caesar if it means unfaithfulness to Him ? And that is not to be mistaken for bad patriotism. That is the *only patriotism*. For the man who forswears God is unworthy of his country's trust and a bad custodian of her honour. He who breaks troth with God —how shall he keep faith with men ?

The Church must at last make it perfectly plain that discipleship of Christ is incompatible with the spurious patriotism which puts the " things of the State " before the " things of God. " The Christian's patriotism

is of a divine order which believes that his country's good *lies only* in the way of obedience to God and the realisation of the Christian Ideal.

The "things of the State" will be soon in a very poor way if the "things of God" are not, in their entirety, rendered unto Him Who claims not a part of our life, but the whole ; not some of our time, but the whole ; not a corner of our heart, but our heart itself, till at last, "all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ."

III

TENNYSON'S PROPHECY OF THE GREAT WAR

Will it be fulfilled?

ONE of the most remarkable and impressive prophecies to be found in literature is the vision that Tennyson gives us in "Locksley Hall." After describing a great war of the nations, in which aerial combats are a prominent feature, the poet goes on to express his conviction that such a war will prove the last to be tolerated by humanity, and will issue in permanent and universal peace. This is the familiar passage :

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could
see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that
would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic
sails,

Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with
costly bales ;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there
rain'd a ghastly dew

From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central
blue ;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind
rushing warm,

With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the
thunder-storm ;

Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-
flags were furl'd

In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the
world.

There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful
realm in awe,

And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal
law.

The prediction here of aerial strife between
nations is very remarkable, because at the
time the poem was written there was not an
aeroplane in existence. Some few years
afterwards an attempt was made with such a
machine, but the effort was very disappoint-
ing. The confident ring of Tennyson's words
marks his passionate belief in the progress of

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the race, and in its destiny of domination over the forces of nature. But it is not this element of the prophecy which is of supreme interest. Rather it is the still finer faith of the poet that man shall learn at last to conquer not only the forces of nature without him, but also the forces of nature within him —that he shall at last

Arise and fly,
The reeling faun, the sensual feast,
Move upwards, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

Tennyson, looking forward to the next great upheaval of nations on a continental scale of war, believes that through the awful discipline of that time man shall learn finally to curb his greed and passion, and so control his animal instincts as to live in the delight of perpetual peace.

The Sacred Cause

The noble story that Tennyson enshrines in "Locksley Hall" is that of a young man—full of the fire and spirit of youth—who returns to his old home to find that the love of his boyhood days, to whom he has remained faithful in all his wanderings, has married,

under the pressure of her father's threats and for money, an unworthy man. The poem opens with the bitter meditations of this youth under his crushing disappointment. As it proceeds we come to that beautiful description of love's influence :

Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his
glowing hands ;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden
sands.

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the
chords with might ;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in
music out of sight.

The poem continues with a satirical description of the "clown" with whom Amy has mated, and there follows a passionate outburst against the deeper causes of the tragedy :

Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength
of youth !

Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living
truth !

Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest
Nature's rule !

Cursed be the gold that gilds the straiten'd forehead
of the fool !

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Then the youth, musing on his ruined hopes, begins to look round for some worthy object for his life's devotion. What shall he live for now ? Is life to be wholly wrecked and ruined, or is there still something worth living for ? Thus the poet leads on to the great vision already described. The youth finds vent for his thwarted loyalties and devotion in an enthusiasm for humanity, and its championship against all that spoils and defiles it. He looks at humanity in the mass, and cries :

Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new :

That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do :

The poet presents us with this vision of a united humanity as a sacred cause, worthy of our utmost devotion, and capable of sweetening the bitter-thoughted heart of the man that has been betrayed and disappointed in life. A united humanity living in perpetual peace—this is his vision. Will it be fulfilled ?

Fortunately there are three great facts which point to the probability of the poet's great hope being realised.

The Trend of Evolution

The first is that history shows a slow but sure movement in the social development of the race towards the abolition of war. Looking back to the distant past we find first of all family clans fighting with each other for mastery. These coalesce gradually into larger tribes and tribal warfare results. But these again, doubtless for greater safety, combine into nations and so war becomes national.

The modern phase, which we trust is now ended for good and all, might be called international warfare. Vast coalitions of nations combining against each other. War is now world-war. This is due to the increasing socialisation of the world. Means of travel and communication have so improved and increased that the nations live very much closer together than ever before. We are all neighbours now, and two cannot quarrel without the rest being involved.

Evolution would seem, therefore, to have but one more step to take. God's Ideal shines unmistakably out of the trend of history. The Unification of Mankind in a Holy

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War against the common, spiritual, and physical ills of human life is seen to be the natural end of the process.

Before that end is realised—if we trust only to the slow and uncertain process of natural evolution—other world-wars may occur. A Great War between the hemispheres of East and West is all too easily possible. God forbid!

Fortunately, if man can oppose and distort God's purpose in natural evolution, *he can also quicken and direct it*, and it remains for the Race to rouse itself to a due appreciation of both the peril and the promise of this great hour. We must recognise God's leading in history, and bend all our forces to the affirmation of His great evident purpose of universal peace and brotherhood.

The League and the Covenant

The second great fact of promise is that the Great War has issued in the Covenant of the League of Nations. The value of this great achievement depends of course upon the earnestness and thoroughness with which the nations respect and honour the Covenant. Nevertheless, in itself it is a great forward

step. It brands war as the supreme crime against humanity. It has behind it, moreover, something that the Holy Alliance lacked—a great mass of intelligent and determined popular conviction that war is a totally unnecessary and evil thing. If "never again" can be made the watchword of every democracy the League with its Covenant will prove an invaluable instrument for the total abolition of war.

One modern writer has pointed out that the appalling cost of modern warfare renders it a luxury in which only about seven of the world's Powers can afford to indulge. So that a thorough unification, in sympathy and ideals, in mutual understanding and forbearance, of the seven Great Powers of the world, should be sufficient to ensure peace for some hundreds of years. That breathing space should in turn prove sufficient for the heart of the world to be utterly weaned from militaristic affections and modes of thought and brought into subjection to the peaceful will of God.

The pacification of Europe will mean the pacification of the world, for the great peoples of the East are militaristic in the modern

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sense mainly by imitation of the bad example of Western civilisation.

The Opportunity of the Church

But we need to realise that these reasons for hope are not sufficient in themselves. The heart of man can resist all the pleadings of common sense and the trend of evolution. He can turn his back upon progress and "rattle back into barbarism"! He can turn the most solemn treaty into a "scrap of paper"! Some other and greater power than expediency is required to unify mankind. Hence we must rest our hope of universal and permanent peace finally on this third great and evident fact, that it is the Will of God and the Aim of the Christian Gospel. The sanction of religion is alone equal to this great task. The Christian Church must lead the way. The Hebrew prophets all associate universal peace with the triumph of Messiah, and the New Testament looks forward confidently and passionately to a New Humanity, which transcends national and class barriers and flows together, soul in soul, as "one man in Christ Jesus."

"In Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, bond

or free, male or female." "The Kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ!" The Kingdoms "shall become the Kingdom"!—what is that but a picture of the League of Nations! The United States of the World!

The Christian who is not passionately interested in the unification of mankind into an effective brotherhood—possible only through Christ—is not following his Lord. Did not He say, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself"? He is the rallying centre of our race. "He is our peace." Here is the great and chief reason for our loving each other—that He loves us all. *He guarantees our eventual worth to one another.* Think of the triumphs of reconciliation Christ has already achieved within His Church. The first and greatest miracle was the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile. We need despair of no opposition in the light of that great victory. So with "master and slave," brought in brotherhood to the table of their common Lord. So with men and women—in spite of the hoary Eastern sex-prejudice, they become real comrades, sisters and brothers in the Lord.

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Jesus lived and died to reconcile the world to God—"the world"—that was always His objective. Nothing less will satisfy Him, and nothing less should satisfy His followers.

The present day is golden with opportunity for a Church that really believes that Christ is the Saviour of the World. Christ is not going to be defeated. But shall *we* be the instruments of His victory ?

It is said of our prophet Tennyson that he was once walking in his garden with a friend who asked him what he thought of the Saviour. Tennyson stopped in his walk and pointed to a flower, saying solemnly, with the thrill of a great conviction in his voice: "What the sun is to that flower Jesus Christ is to me ! He is the sun of my soul !" Can we say that ? Can we say with absolute faith, " He is the Light of the World " ? If not, then we may well doubt the fulfilment of Tennyson's beautiful vision. For only Christ can truly unite the nations in positive love to each other. Paper schemes or covenants, political stratagems, even great international organisations, will not avail unless His Spirit reign in all our hearts. Is He not saying to the whole world in this great hour :

“ To-day—if ye will hear My voice. Harden not your hearts ”?

Be sure that since this is God’s Ideal, not Tennyson’s alone, that if we will not come to it whole-heartedly and of our free choice, then He will bring us face to face with it by a Greater War yet. He has no other alternative. A humanity that will not agree must quarrel. *We either choose Him Who is our Peace, or rejecting Him we make War certain.*

With the voice of our holy dead pleading in unison with the Voice of the Prince of Peace, can we fail to choose aright? Let us believe that we may yet see even with our own eyes that time arrive which Tennyson thus further describes in “ Locksley Hall Sixty Years After ”:

When the schemes and all the systems, Kingdoms and Republics fall,
Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each and each for all?

All the full-brain, half-brain races, led by Justice, Love, and Truth;

All the millions one at length with all the visions of my youth?

All diseases quench’d by Science, no man halt, or deaf or blind;

Stronger ever born of weaker, lustier body, larger mind?

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Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue—

I have seen her far away—for is not Earth as yet so young ?—

Every tiger madness muzzl'd, every serpent passion killed,

Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert till'd.

Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,

Universal ocean softly washing all her warless Isles.

IV

“ THE GREATEST SAYING OF THE WAR ”

The Challenge of Edith Cavell

IT is a significant fact that the greatest word uttered during the late War, the word which has in it most of the true ring of inspired prophecy, the saying which more than any other is best fitted to be the motto of those who declare they are fighting only for the sake of Peace, Liberty, and Humanity, has been uttered by a *woman*. The greatest thing has been said, not by a politician, nor by a premier or cabinet minister, not even by a journalist, but by a woman, a member of that gentle Sisterhood of Mercy, the nursing profession.

Edith Cavell must have been living very close to the Supreme Mind for her to have framed, under such strain and stress, the

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glorious declaration that fell from her lips just before her death. These are her words :

“ Standing as I do, in view of God and Eternity, I realise that Patriotism is not enough, there must be no bitterness or hatred in my heart against any one.”

Those words do more than express the growing international consciousness of the world. They place Edith Cavell in that wonderful succession of moral heroism whose fountain-head is the Crucified, praying forgiveness on His foes, and which passes down through Stephen and many another Christian martyr who has risen to the Master’s Spirit in the hour of cruel persecution. It is only that Spirit, incorruptible by evil, capable of suffering down every final wrong, which can save the world at last.

In Nurse Cavell’s challenging words there is presented to the world a call to Internationalism, and a call to the Spirit that forgives.

Patriotism is not enough

Let there be no doubt about the patriotism. When Edith Cavell heard the news of the outbreak of war she was in England at her mother’s house, enjoying a well-earned rest

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after her great work of reorganising the nursing profession in Belgium ; a work in which she earned the grateful assistance of the Belgian Queen. She was busy in the garden, tending a bed of heartsease, that sweet typical English flower. There was the flower-bed before her, and the sweet English home-garden around her, and in her ears the call that war always brings to the nurse.

The issue was never seriously in doubt. Almost at once she returned to Belgium, knowing that it could not be long before her services would be needed by the men broken on the anvil of war.

It was her eager patriotic service on behalf of escaping British Tommies, her Scarlet Pimpernel-like chivalry of assistance to them, that led to her trial and death at the hands of men for whom chivalry had no meaning. “I am glad to die for my country,” she said just before execution.

Let there be no doubt of her patriotism. Neither let there be any doubt of ours.

Breathes there the man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land !

Can we help loving England—

This dear, dear land,
This land of such dear souls ?

Patriotism is a noble and a fine emotion that must never be allowed to die.

False Patriotism

For that very reason, however, it is more necessary to guard it from caricature and from the exaggeration that distorts and eventually destroys it. The swagger patriot is a positive danger to his country. With perfect truth one can adapt the famous couplet and say :

He *loves* not England
Who only England *loves*.

We know this false patriotism. Its coarse jingoism, its indecent boasting, its pitiable ignorance of other lands and peoples, its readiness to believe all that is bad about other nations.

It was just such a false and dangerous type of patriotism which gave us the war. Germany interpreted "patriotism" as by itself "enough," subordinating to it even the solemn moral law of God. "Necessity

knows no law,” said the German Chancellor; “we must hack our way through Belgium.” And that same doctrine, that “patriotism” is the only law, that State necessity is above morality, led the once great nation of Germany into the most brutal and cynical method of warfare possible to men.

The patriotism that is so full of self that the rights of others are ignored and trampled on, that is the kind of patriotism that brought the War and its attendant miseries. It is the *betrayal* not the *bulwark* of the State.

What would be said of the man whose love for his wife was of such a character that he could not be happy except in disparaging the wives of other men? He would soon prove a danger even to his own spouse. The Varsity man loves his college, his Alma Mater, above all others, yet he does not think it necessary to go round hammering the men of other colleges. He would serve the reputation of his own college very poorly if he did.

We know what happens when a mother thinks so overweeningly of her own child that she insults other folks’ children. It is bad for the child. It is spoiled and pampered and brings sorrow to the mother’s

heart at last. Such love is the destruction of the home.

Nationalism

So with Nationalism. It must be held in a form and degree that harmonises with Internationalism, or there is no security for the State, and no hope of world peace and progress.

We must free the embassies of the world of the mischievous notion that one must aggrandise one's own Empire and nation at the expense of others. We must abolish the idea that there is an incompatibility of interests. We must train our children to be citizens of the world, lovers of humanity, admirers of the heroes and heroines that every people is able to boast. Thus will be bred a race whose love of country shall never be the peril of their own or any other land. Patriotism must be perfected in Internationalism.

There was, however, a deeper meaning still in Nurse Cavell's mind when she said, "Patriotism is not enough." The second part of her saying gives the clue. It was "in view of God and Eternity" that Edith

Cavell came to her great conviction. She was evidently thinking of her relation to God, and His demand for the forgiving spirit. It is religion alone that truly completes patriotism. Only a deep reverence for God can give to patriotism a character which will bless and not blight the ideals of mankind, and provide nations with that patience towards each other so necessary if peace is to be permanent.

Was there in Edith Cavell's mind the belief that this great and tragic struggle would never end aright except in great triumphs of magnanimity and mutual forgiveness? In her ministrations she was gloriously impartial, caring tenderly for the German lads, as well as the men of the allied forces; and at last she found it impossible to contemplate the nearer Presence of God with her heart tainted by hate. She could enter that awful Presence only after casting from her soul every feeling, however natural, of vengeful bitterness.

Preparing for Peace

Cannot the nations, too, learn her lesson? What hope of a stable peace until the peoples

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try to stand in each other's shoes and see with each other's eyes? Common justice and the protection of mankind may call rightly for the due restraint of the groups of militarists who have engineered this terrible crime, but the peoples of every country have been foolish rather than wicked, and have expiated their folly in appalling sufferings and sacrifice.

Whatever may be thought of the Peace Treaty let the peoples prepare for real peace by envisaging that Spirit which alone can heal the terrible wounds war has made.

Lord Charnwood has recently reminded the world of the noble clemency of Abraham Lincoln, "The Demos of the English-speaking race," as he calls him, at the end of the American Civil War. Firm as adamant in his pursuit of what he felt to be an utterly righteous cause he proved just as firm in his gentle use of victory. "In all that concerned the approaching settlement he stood for a patience, a charity, a superiority to pedantry or to haste, which were dismally missed when, with the words of pardon still almost upon his tongue, he fell. Against measures of vindictiveness he was eagerly on guard."

“ The message of Lincoln is that of a man who was utterly brave and gentle ; equally tenacious of his sternest and his mildest purposes, because both were needed in his abounding love of men.”

Lincoln has left behind him words that deserve to stand side by side with Nurse Cavell’s golden saying. “ With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in ; to bind up this nation’s wounds ; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for the widow and the orphan ; to do all that may cherish a just and lasting peace.”

The point that focuses the beauty of that great utterance lies in the words, “ this nation’s wounds,” in which Lincoln was referring to the One nation of Northern and Southern States. *And they were uttered before victory !*

Is it not obvious that if a new Internationalism is in the making nations must learn a forbearance, a tolerance, a desire to do justly and kindly one to another, that they have hitherto utterly failed to cherish adequately ; and that only the Spirit that

forgives, therefore, can ensure the stability of the coming peace.

The Mediating Influence of Love

Only the mediating Presence of God can truly reconcile men and nations. They must learn to look on each other "as found in Him." His love alone is pure enough and strong enough to plead the cause of our neighbour, with our prejudice and pride. This mediating influence of Love is very familiar to us in ordinary life. How many a man learns to love those who before were perfect strangers to him because of the love he bears to the woman he makes his wife. Her friends become his through her reconciling love.

Dickens presents this situation very humorously in his *Holly Tree Inn*. Master Harry says to Cobbs the gardener, "Cobbs, I like you! Why do I like you, do you think, Cobbs? *Because Norah likes you.*" "Indeed, sir," says Cobbs, "that's very gratifying." "Gratifying, Cobbs?" says Master Harry. "It's better than a million of the brightest diamonds to be liked by Norah."

It is on that homely domestic principle that nations are going to learn to love each

other. Loved of God ! If such is the condition of every people, then there is indeed sufficient reason for them to love each other.

Until that happy day comes, and in order that it may come, let the followers of Jesus at least respond to Edith Cavell's noble challenge and say from their hearts, “ Standing as *we* do, in view of God and Eternity, *we* realise that patriotism is not enough ; there must be no bitterness or hatred in *our* hearts towards any one.”

V

THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC OF FORGIVENESS

WE need to understand more clearly the Christian ethic of forgiveness, especially as there is apparent a great deal of false and confused thinking upon the subject. When one finds it repeatedly stated that forgiveness can only follow upon repentance, and is practically immoral otherwise, then it is high time the Church reminded itself of the most elementary meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such statements as I have referred to are the more dangerous because they state a half-truth, and one which fits in far too well with the vindictiveness that is all too constant a temptation to human nature.)

What "Forgiveness" means

(We are easily caught by the half-truth I have challenged, because we so constantly

make the blunder of associating forgiveness with the consequences of sin rather than with sin itself. Forgiveness tends to be restricted in our minds to the poverty-stricken significance of "letting off," "permitting to go scot-free," "releasing from consequences." It becomes thereby an action indistinguishable from the weak indulgence of those who have no vivid sense of the wickedness of sin, or are too cowardly to assert their personal rights. By getting into bad companionship in our thoughts, forgiveness becomes identified with what is "weak" and "namby-pamby."

The grand corrective of this serious error is to get back to the teaching and person of Jesus, and into the presence of the God of Forgiveness. At least the forgiveness divine can have nothing weak or foolish about it, and God—as Jesus interprets Him to us—is essentially and supremely a God of Forgiveness. So much so, indeed, that you dare not worship Him whilst you deny forgiveness to a brother. "Leave thou thy gift upon the altar, and go, first be reconciled with thy brother, then come and offer thy gift." It is useless to pray to this God of

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Forgiveness if you are not willing yourself to forgive.

Now evidently the primary meaning of forgiveness cannot be merely the annulling of consequences, for many a sincere soul has prayed for divine forgiveness, has felt that forgiveness, and yet has had to bear the often grievous results of his sin. *“Forgiveness” is a forth-giving of oneself in renewed feelings of friendliness and activity of friendly purpose.* It is an attempt to restore soul-union between the wronged and the wronger. This is why we must forgive to feel and know God’s forgiveness. He is love, and only by giving place to love in our hearts can we let Him into them. If, then, our communion with Him is to be constant, as the New Testament everywhere urges upon us, then our forgiveness of others must be constant too ; *it cannot and dare not wait upon penitence in others.*

The precedence of forgiveness over repentance follows inevitably from the Christian revelation of God as a God of constant love and mercy. For the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not, as He is sometimes made to appear even by Christian

advocates, a God of changeable temper, sometimes merciful, sometimes condemnatory and vindictive. "His mercy is over all His works." "His mercy endureth for ever." He is always and invariably and everlasting love. Wrath is only the form His love must take in relation to certain types of obstinacy ; it is never the fundamental form of His love.

Forgiveness, then, means sharing the divine spirit of loving purpose towards every sinful soul—a purpose which "does not alter when it alteration finds," a purpose which does not wait upon repentance, but rather strives to anticipate and awaken repentance. The sharing of that spirit, forgiveness of this fundamental kind, is a constant obligation upon the Christian disciple. It is not a spirit, therefore, that he can put off, because, forsooth, some one has wronged him, or even wronged some one dear to him. Should he miss that spirit at any time it is a grievous sin, for which his opponent cannot be made solely responsible.

(The half-truthfulness of the plea that repentance must precede forgiveness arises from the fact that the spirit of divine love may be greatly thwarted in its beneficent purpose by the hardness of the unrepentant

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soul. The sinner may by his obduracy prevent your doing much for him, however forgiving your spirit may be ; but behind your inability your spirit will not falter in its purpose of love and restoration ; it will rather seek by greater and greater self-sacrifice to reach the hidden and reluctant soul upon whom its merciful love is fixed.

This consideration brings us right to the heart of the matter. It brings us to the Cross. To the Cross of our Lord, which shows us God suffering down the obduracy of sinful humanity, pleading by blood and anguish with the impenitent souls of men, asserting His forgiving love in face of the jeering contempt of the world, and proving it in uttermost self-sacrifice.

And it brings us to our own Cross, if we are going to forgive as we have been forgiven. There is always a risk in forgiveness—a risk of being misunderstood, of being flouted and rejected, of being crucified, but in accepting its cross patiently and without resentment, the forgiving spirit of God in us proves its utter purity and perfect love with such convicting power that at last the hardest heart is broken and the vilest sinner won.

Strikingly enough this fact of atonement, this painful effort to reach the obdurate soul, is all in the very word "forgiveness," as it comes to us in its Greek forms. Beneath them all is the idea of effort on behalf of the sinful, and in some of its stronger forms, used by Jesus and Paul, it carries such meanings as "doing a favour," and "making it up," ~~Do you remember~~ the old days at school and the school-boy quarrels, and the "making it up" by little services of goodwill?

So, in the sterner clash of men with men, and nations with nations, Christian forgiveness stands for sacrificial effort, to convince men that they are loved with an everlasting love, a love which is indeed, to borrow Francis Thompson's phrase, a veritable "hound of heaven." Because Christian forgiveness means the assertion of an unvarying love to every sinful soul and an attempt to make that love felt at all costs, forgiveness in the Christian ethic precedes repentance.

The Teaching and Example of our Lord

The teaching and example of Jesus upon this matter is extremely illuminating and convincing. Christ's whole idea of God is

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of a father, who meets his prodigal son more than half way with the offer of forgiveness. The very conception of the gospel, the meaning of the Incarnation, is this, that God seeks men ere ever they seek Him. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost." And the perfection of the Father is always the pattern, in Christ's view, of the Christian's perfection. His attitude to the sinner can never be blankly vindictive, never merely righteous with the righteousness that is purely critical and unredemptive. Righteousness for Jesus, justice for Jesus, could never be divorced from love. The teaching of Jesus, however, is enormously strengthened and vindicated by His example. Let us take four incidents. ~~examples~~

1. *The Woman taken in Adultery.*—There are few sins so vile as this, or that so quickly call upon ordinary human nature for blank repression and unreserved condemnation of the sinner. Here, if anywhere, surely repentance must precede forgiveness. Yet read the story as John tells it. Where is there the least suggestion that the woman was penitent? Not even after Christ's masterly stroke of deliverance on her behalf

are we permitted to glimpse her "repentance." Jesus forgave her freely, and took repentance for granted, showing His magnificent trust in the operation of love, and in the reserves of goodness lying deeper than sin in every human soul. What a gulf is here revealed between the method and belief of Jesus, and those of ordinary society!

2. *The Story of Peter.*—Peter's sin was very gross. It was incredibly mean and cowardly of ~~him~~. Jesus read his weakness of character very shrewdly, yet did not harden his heart against him. *Jesus prayed for Peter.* And when the sin had been committed there is no bitterness in the attitude of Jesus, nothing but "effort to redeem." The "look" that broke Peter's heart ere ever he "wept bitterly" would never have done so had "love and forgiveness" been absent from it. And after the resurrection Christ's first thought is for His fallen disciple. "Tell Peter," He says.

The effect of Christ's method becomes evident in that gem of conversation preserved for us by John, which took place between Peter and Jesus on the shore of the lake.

“ Lovest thou Me ? ” asks Jesus three times, tempting Peter to his old self-assertiveness. But Peter is changed, he is a penitent, ~~humbled~~ man, a new creature, made so by the Lord’s divine forgiveness.

3. *The Story of Judas.*—Here we have blacker sin still, yet it serves only to fling into more golden splendour the royal forgiveness of Jesus. Here again Jesus read the ugly possibility of treachery in Judas very early in their relationship. Jesus was not deceived by the men about Him. He was not the credulous visionary that some have thought of Him. “ He knew what was in man,” says one of the Evangelists, referring to His knowledge of human sin. Yet in spite of that we find Jesus constantly and subtly wrestling with Judas, to save him from his sin. The most impressive instance of this is the report given by John of the washing of the disciples’ feet. “ Having loved His own,” says John, “ He loved them to the end.” He washed the feet of Judas among those of the twelve, stooping to the lowliest service in one more appeal to the traitor.

One of the latest interpretations by

scholarship of the "sop" incident during the Last Supper pictures the scene like this. John, leaning on Christ's bosom, is moved by the other disciples to inquire of Jesus who the traitor is in their midst. Jesus whispered back to John, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it." Then, turning immediately to Judas, He gave him the sop—a further appeal to love—and then, seeing its failure, He urged him, "That thou doest, do quickly." In the very moment, therefore, when Judas took the final plunge into sin Jesus may have saved his life by getting him quickly out of the upper room. For there were swords in that room, and possibly they would have been used in another moment or two. So, again, we see the divine method at work—love pursuing with invincible forgiveness the soul that lies buried beneath its sin.

4. Finally, *Christ's free forgiveness of those crucifying Him* completes the argument from Christ's example. "Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is quite impossible to restrict the scope of that appeal to the Roman soldiers, as some have tried to do. It is doubtful if they needed

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to be forgiven, inasmuch as they were but carrying out orders they were under obligation to fulfil. The sin of the situation lies with the priests and the crowd. It is for these, utterly impenitent at the moment, that Jesus pleads forgiveness, and implicitly gives to them His own.

In doing so, Jesus is true to the most fundamental meaning of His sacrifice. The Cross declares an Atonement, purposed and carried through, for every sinning soul, ~~ever~~ ^{before} it is convicted of its sin or in the least repentant. Christ is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." He tells the vilest sinner that he is forgiven in the Divine Love, and so has no reason to fear, reason only to believe. Jesus tells all men from His Cross, what He told the paralytic early in His Ministry, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Why Forgiveness precedes Repentance

There must be some profound and good reason for the practice of Jesus. The answer surely is found in that last great word, "For they know not what they do." In all human sin there is an abundant element of unreason,

a failing of the human mind, a misjudgment, a knowing-not. This is the only thing that makes it forgivable. It does not express the true man. The man has yet to "come to himself," as Jesus said of the prodigal, and when that happens he will grow ashamed of his temporary sinful self. This is no theory, it is fact, as any one can prove who will reflect upon his own sins. Do you know the feeling of "wonder" that ~~you~~ should ever have been capable of this or that? Temporary mental aberration, the failure of the higher centres of the brain, is the explanation of many sinful actions.

Tennyson's story of King Arthur and Guinevere is a notable commentary upon this truth, especially the words of the fallen queen :

It was my duty to have loved the highest ;
It surely was my profit had I known :
It would have been my pleasure, had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it.

This explanation, of course, must not be pushed to extremes. It does not annul responsibility, for one should have better mental control, and one should "walk in the

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light," and not "in the darkness." Many sins are simply the fruit of careless mental living, which leaves the mind a prey to sophistry.

Evil is wrought for want of thought
As well as want of heart.

But "want of thought" is itself sinful. So there is responsibility, tempered by the extenuating circumstance of the strain of life upon the mind of man. Deliberate sin against the *full* light of knowledge is not human ; we have to coin a word for it, and call it devilish. It means moral insanity. Doubtless it is a vague extreme possibility for men, but in practical life one does not meet it ; there is always some supposed self-interest blinding the soul, distorting its vision, calling for our pity.

Now forgiveness, by its natural appeal to the better self, rouses and revives the better mind, predisposes the guilty soul to a rejudgment of the situation, robs it of all self-justification in its selfish action, in excuse for which it loves to plead the hardness and selfishness of the world, and so leads on to a "change of mind." The psalmist knew this

when he cried, "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.")

I remember when I was a boy frequently rousing the maternal wrath and being chased round a table more than once. And so long as my dear mother was prepared to fight, so was I, quite ready for all the "unbroken joy of battle." But my mother's spirit was very gentle, and presently her antagonism would melt into pain and disappointment and shame at my behaviour. And as there appeared the spectacle of love, such love, suffering, all the pride and self-justification would break in my heart, and I hated myself for the little cad I was, to try so sorely a mother's patience. (In St. Paul's phrase, "Coals of fire," there is a terrible truth. *The hell of remorse and penitence is kindled by nothing so surely as by the amazing mercy of that God Who is a consuming fire of love.*)

Seeing, then, that the mainspring of sin is selfishness as well as ignorance of the good, if it is to be overcome the good must live and shine in us. Hate must be fought with love, and cruelty with forgiveness. Not that all the consequences should or can be annulled. The consequences are not merely evil, again

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and again they are the soul's best source of illumination, proving its tragic error. Such illumination, however, is not enough by itself. It but lights the way to despair, unless there be shining also the light "which is above the brightness of the noonday sun," the light of divine mercy and of the hope of salvation.

"Father," said Jesus, "forgive them, they know not what they do." And so our knowledge of God, the teaching and example of our Lord, the working of the human mind, the needs of our frail and sin-prone human nature, all combine to urge us to be more willing for the erring soul to return than that soul is to come; not to wait, but to go forth to seek and "to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

The sinful hearts of men are visited by recurring spring-tides of remorse and penitence; such tides ebb fruitlessly away when met only by the crabbed, mean, self-righteous spirit of the world; they flow to flood-tide when greeted by the full sunshine of a love divine in its freedom and prodigal in its passion and sacrifice. So let us pray George MacDonald's noble prayer :

Oh, make my anger pure ; let no worst wrong
Rouse in me the old laggard selfishness.
Give me Thine indignation, which is love
Turned on the evil that would part love's throng.
Thy anger scathes because it needs must bless,
Gathering into union calm and strong
All things on earth, and under, and above.
Make my forgiveness downright, such, as I
Should perish if I did not have from Thee.
I let the wrong go, withered up and dry,
Cursed with divine forgetfulness in me ;
'Tis but self-pity, pleasant, mean, and sly,
Low whispering bids the paltry memory live,
What am I brother for but to forgive ?

Lord, I forgive—and step in unto Thee.

VI

THE BLESSINGS OF POVERTY

Man's Relation to Money

THERE are few aspects of the present world-crisis more grave than the financial one. If Jesus was right in declaring it hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom and easier for a poor man, then many of us are going to have an excellent opportunity of finding His Kingdom. For there is the prospect that before we are much older we are all going to be considerably poorer.

Bad news? Well, it depends upon point of view. From the standpoint of the New Testament it is possible to hail it as "glad tidings." "Woe unto ye rich!" "Blessed are ye poor!" are almost refrains in the New Testament. Jesus uttered the words with no uncertain sound. The Apostles practised poverty with noble vigour. Paul's statement

regarding the love of money as a great root of evil is amongst the best known of Scripture texts. The New Testament is insistent that a man's relation to his money is full of meaning for his relation to God.

Poverty for Jesus was no sign of shame ; wealth was no badge of honour. How far do we agree with Him ? Upon the answer to that question will depend very much our peace of mind at the prospect before us.

The question is of urgent importance for the Church. There is a sense in which Christians may expect to be poorer than other people, for they have to keep the churches in a higher state of efficiency than ever before, in order to meet the greatly increased spiritual demands of the present time. There is greater need than ever for our work as Churches, and it must be better done. There must be no curtailment of resources there. Christians must learn at last to put a margin round their incomes for the campaign funds of the holiest war of all.

The worldling is finding this matter urgent too. Some of the financial tragedies of these times seem on the surface very sad. To have one's business swept away, and one's

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modest reserves dissipated, to face again the hard grind for a livelihood for oneself and family at the time of life when one hoped to find rest from the long years of toil—is not this a matter for lamentation ? Does it not, of necessity, open the floodgates of the soul to anxiety and despair ?

Is it possible to find such a situation emptied of its tragedy, and filled with opportunity ? If there is any light bearing on this cruel problem from Him Who “had not where to lay His Head,” should we not seek it ? If these words meet the eyes of any who have lost heavily of this world’s goods, let me say this : You may be closer to the secret of the wealth of God than ever you were during those years of comfort and riches. Is not this a matter to be carefully investigated ? Things may be better than you realise.

But there are others who are making more money than they have ever made. Some are becoming rich for the first time in their lives ; others are piling up huge profits. True, the governments everywhere, in a quite unusual regard for the souls of the wealthy, propose to impound as much as possible of the profits, and a fine patriotism can welcome the pro-

position without complaint. But how many welcome it with relief? If there is a curse lurking in the riches of this world, are you aware of it? Are you alert and watchful regarding it? Or, blind to it, have you already paid a bigger price than you can afford in order to be rich? "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." What words could be stronger? Have you grasped their meaning?

Wherein lies the Peril of Riches?

The rich young man in the well-known gospel story is a most typical figure—a man torn between spiritual riches and material wealth. In his picture of this rich young ruler, G. F. Watts has most clearly suggested the irresolution that characterises him. The figure, clothed in costly robes, but with bowed head, is truly symbolic of the wealth which, while making rich, "addeth sorrow thereto." The bend of the shoulder as the figure turns away, and the hand especially, half open, half shut, two fingers closing on the "great possession," two still extended after "eternal

life," emphasise the struggle between his love of money and the yearning of his soul. But why does he turn away? The answer is, pride, the supreme peril of riches. The young man has great possessions, and they mean power for him, and youth loves power.

The Pride of Possession

The pride of possession expresses itself mainly and most mischievously in the trust that is placed in wealth. Jesus recognised this. When the disciples expressed surprise at His first reference to the difficulty of a rich man entering the Kingdom, Jesus repeated the statement, elaborating the idea a little more clearly, and the change He made was very important. His second statement was, "How hard it is for them that *trust in riches* to enter the Kingdom of God!" Jesus made it clear that the mischief of riches lies not in themselves, but in the subtle way in which they monopolise the trust of men.

And is there one of us who does not know the evil power resident in wealth? Who of us does not believe in money? Money is a great power, we say; and often the soul,

traitor to the Highest, whispers in reply, "Yes, it is the greatest power. Give me money, and I will be good. Give me money, and I will change the world." We share to the full the conviction betrayed by the disciples when they cried, "Who then can be saved?"

It needs a good income to make a Christian—isn't that a common belief in our day? Money can do much, we say. It can raise the abject poor; it can educate the ignorant; it can house people properly; it can provide the refining influences of music and art and literature, and beautiful surroundings.

So it can, in the hands of one strong enough to master its subtle temptations, but how many souls are strong enough? Very few.

The Limitations of Money

But, after all, money, as money, can do none of these things. A man has only to become rich to realise to the full how limited this boasted power of money is. It has been well described as "the purchaser of all things but happiness, and the passport to everywhere but heaven"! Its raising of the poor is often the sheerest mockery, for it constantly

fails to inspire in them the industry and nobility that alone can profit by such help. Money may feed the body, but it cannot guarantee the feeding of the soul. Money can raise emporiums of education and sprinkle public libraries broadcast over the land, but it cannot give the "will to learn," or inspire that humility of spirit without which there is no progress in knowledge.

As for refining influences, look at the wealthy ! Contrast a typical millionaire with a struggling, keen-minded artisan ! You will soon discover which of them reads and enjoys Shakespeare, listens to good music, and is interested in Utopia. It is quite true that money may do much to bring within the reach of the very poor many things of the World-Beautiful, and should be used for that purpose ; but here again of itself it cannot ensure the love of the beautiful and the worship of the pure.

This peril of a false trust and pride in money is not limited to any one class. "Thou shalt not covet" was not addressed only to the wealthy, nor only to the poor. No fortune is ever big enough to satisfy the soul in love with money, no poverty can excuse

an inordinate desire for riches. It is, perhaps, the special temptation of the soul which is hot and rebellious at misfortune to fix its affections on money and callously to determine to get it at all costs. This way lies pride, and fraud, and theft, and murder, and all the countless horrors that cluster about the throne of Mammon.

If you are tempted to love money, consider its intimate connection with every great evil. The love of worldly power and wealth lay at the root of the Great War. Men ply their fellows with drink to make money ; men take to drink in hatred of their miserable poverty, having no better solace. The slums of our towns bear witness to the rapacity of the wealthy for more wealth, and the "toadyism" of the poor bespeaks the same demoralising influence. The fear of being poor, or the desire to be rich quickly, fill our prisons with embezzlers and thieves, and taints myriads of lives with a thousand little meannesses and warpings of character. The desire to remain well-off hinders many even who have not great possessions from any real sacrifice for God. All our life is smeared over by the ugly, dirty hand of Mammon.

Be not in a hurry to increase your possessions. You may part with more than you gain.

I remember hearing of a man and his wife who kept a little shop in a little town. Life was a hard struggle, and often the way seemed impossible. At such times man and wife would sink on their knees together in the shabby little parlour behind the shop and lay the matter before God. In spite of the hardness of the struggle life was rich in the fellowship and joy of true love and a real home. The business prospered, and at last they moved to a bigger shop in a larger town. Then branches were opened in other centres, and the husband had to be often away from home. Business had to be attended to, and husband and wife saw each other but seldom, and never now prayed together—there was never any time—and although the wife had more to spend than ever in her life before, the real joy of life had fled. She had gained a fortune and lost her husband, and both suffered in their life with God. /

Be in no haste to be rich, " for the love of money is a great root of evil which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the

faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

If this, then, be true, the reverse of the shield must be brighter than many think. Has poverty its blessings? What are they?

"What am I worth?"

The first thing that happens to a man who loses his possessions is that he has only himself left. The man of wealth is sought for his possessions. If the poor man is sought, he is sought for himself. The rich man gets into the habit of confusing his worth with his wealth, asking, "What am I worth?" in the sense of "What do I possess?" The poor man is obliged by the very extremity of his need to ask himself in the deepest sense of all "What am I worth? What strength is there in my body? What talents are native to my mind? What courage can my heart muster? What determination can my will support?"

Thus it is that the poor man knows himself and stands a better chance of developing a "self" that is worth knowing than does the rich man, who may know only the self of the

costly robes and the bejewelled exterior, and is a stranger to his own heart.

Our poverty may teach us many things about ourselves to which hitherto we may have been blind. It will recall us to the true and divine standard for judging men, ourselves included, namely not by what they have, but by what they are. And if we regret our wealth, and the power it was or might have been for good, we may remember that in the thought of Jesus a man can do more for the world by what he *is* than by what he *has*. "For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of that which he posseseth," and "As a man is, so is his strength."

The second main blessing of poverty is that it reminds men of God. When men have wealth and can supply so many of their superficial needs, and when they put their trust in it as though it could do all things, then the soul inevitably slumbers, its needs lie dormant and assert no challenge; the thought of God seems to be unnecessary, and Providence is an unknown because unneeded experience. Again and again it happens that it is not till the external buttresses of our life are knocked away that we think of an inner

citadel, a strong Power to which we may flee, deep within the unseen world. Again and again it happens that not until the world fails us do we seek the God Who never fails. Many of us will only learn in a hard school. Thank God that in the hard school there is so much to learn that is wonderful in its solace, of His Fatherhood and His Providence, for those who trust Him.

Wealth of the Poor

Perhaps God is better known amongst the poor than amongst the rich, because they have felt greater need for Him. This means, of course, that the poor, if they have God, have a wealth far superior to anything the world can give. Do you remember the story Bunyan tells of the pilgrim who was set upon by robbers in Dead Man's Lane? The pilgrim declares that the thieves could not find his wealth—it was hidden where they did not think of looking for it, in his heart. Says he, "They only took my 'spending money.' "

If we have been well off, and have lost much of what we possessed, the world has only taken our "spending money." We have vast wealth still within our reach. The

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wealth of God ! The treasure of Heaven ! What are the riches of Christ ? What is that wealth ? Shall we describe it in the terms of the sorry baubles of the world ? Golden crowns, the vain pomp and show of temporal power ? Nay, the riches of Christ consist of the glories of the soul. The love that is selfless, the honour that is unstained, the mind that is the home of truth and knowledge, the will that is fixed in righteousness, and that fellowship with humanity which is God's delight.

So we come to the third great blessing of poverty. It puts us with the masses rather than with the classes. It gives us the freedom of that city of man which is the true city of God. Jesus loved the common people, and He sought to make Himself one of them by sharing their hardships and even bearing their sin. *He* never spoke of the "lower classes." Common humanity, the mass of the humble, nobly-striving poor was the highest class for Him, and it was by their honest service of the "least of these" that He judged the governing classes.

The truest joy of life is to be found in that love of men which is born of the love of

Christ. That love makes men willing to be poor, and able at the same time "to make many rich."

(This boon of poverty—namely, a closer unity with humanity—is quaintly stated in a passage of Scripture. Peter is asking what the disciples may expect for leaving all to follow Jesus, and Jesus makes the significant promise, "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions."

With Persecutions

Do we catch the glory of that promise? The disciples are to enter the great fellowship of humanity. Because of their pure love of God and man, innumerable avenues of power will be opened to them, the fortunes of innumerable lives will be placed in their hands for God's service, they will become stewards of a new and vaster wealth than anything the world can give. Do we not know how perfectly the promise was fulfilled? What

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power for good came to these men, what lives welcomed them into the inner citadel of love !

So it may be with us. We may take our stand helpfully beside the humanity that strives and struggles so nobly for the bare necessities of life, and withal maintains such courage and good cheer, and such general honesty and purity ; or we may set ourselves to join the circle of the snobbish few who prefer their own happiness and comfort to all beside, and exploit the needs of humanity for their own petty aggrandisement.

Is it not a fact that amongst the poor there is more “neighbourliness” (in the Good Samaritan sense of the term as well as every other), more co-operation in the task of living than in any other section of society ! It is the poor who are kind to the poor, and their kindness is costly. It was the poor widow who cast her all into the treasury. The tendency of poverty is to make for that brotherhood of men that Jesus is ever seeking to establish. Poverty may yet teach the Churches a better way of Christian witness and life.

Here, then, are the gifts of poverty—Self,

God, Humanity. Yourself as you really are, in your true talents and in your truest and deepest needs. God as your Father, providing for you daily tokens of His care. Humanity, your race, your true family, apart from which you are not true men or true children of God ; that humanity for which Christ died (He died for all), and for which He lives and works until He shall present a holy brotherhood, freed from hunger and pain, sin and death, and every blemish, before His Father in Heaven.

These are the gifts of poverty if we accept Christ. Christ in the heart robs wealth of its perils and poverty of its pains. If we are rich He will teach us a new poverty—the poverty that maketh others rich. If we are poor, He will teach us a new wealth—His own “unsearchable riches.”



VII

THE REDEMPTION OF OUR COMMON LIFE

A CHRISTMAS STUDY

The Incarnation

THE fact represented by Christmas is the supreme fact of history—the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth.

It is well for us at times to use synonyms for the great theological words of our faith in order to save them from becoming meaningless in their very familiarity. Thus it might be well for us occasionally to speak of the "enfleshment" of God's Eternal Son. The word falls harshly on our delicate modern ear. We do not feel the harshness of that syllable "carn" in incarnation, except when we use it in another word, "carnal." The revolt we feel at such a word as "enflesh-

ment," or simply "flesh," the timidity with which we commonly use it, is instructive. It shows how far we are even yet from grasping the full significance of this daring idea of incarnation.

A chronic Mother Grundyism seems to afflict us in our thought of and use of such words as "flesh" and "body." It is common to hosts of people, this feeling almost of indelicacy in suggesting that the Son of God came in the likeness of "sinful flesh." The reason lies in fear, fear born of all too frequent spiritual defeat by the flesh, of our ghastly failure to dominate and use righteously the body. It is fear of the fierce animal passions that slumber beneath all our modern refinement and ever and anon burst through the thin veneer of culture with volcanic energy.

Consequently our tendency is ever to keep a tight hand upon "carnal" interests and thoughts, to crush and maim these bodily passions, to grow nervous and ascetic in our repression of the flesh.

From time to time this policy towards the flesh, dictated by fear, has produced a very false kind of spirituality. For example, one of the first heresies that the Christian Church

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had to combat was the heresy of Docetism, which taught that the body, the flesh of Christ, was not real, but only a phantom, a make-believe, a pretence, a mere appearance.

Later, we have the age of the Anchorites, and the growth of monasticism identifying Christianity with a contempt of the body and an exaltation of celibacy and virginity utterly foreign to the fundamental genius and aim of the faith of Christ. That faith, as expressed in this supreme fact of Incarnation, is not the discarding or contempt of the body, but victory over it, and a complete redemption of all its powers. Let us look further into the matter.

The Word was made Flesh

The New Testament, you notice, is not squeamish over the use of this word. Indeed, it is almost peculiarly insistent, and St. Paul even speaks of Christ being made manifest in the likeness of our "sinful flesh," as though he were fearful that men might ascribe to Christ some inhuman kind of body. Even in the Gospel of St. John, which emphasises peculiarly the Godhead of Jesus, the reality of His fleshly humanity is never lost to

sight. John tells us that Jesus was hungry and tired as He rested by Sychar's well, that He took part in the marriage feast of Cana, and dined in Simon's house. He, too, records the physical torture of the last days, the scourging, the wounds, the giving up of the ghost. There is no doubt in John's mind as to the flesh of the Son of God. Why was not some more refined word chosen? Why not our favourite word "Personality"? That is our great word for men of genius. Or a word very popular in those days, "Philosopher," or the Jewish word, "Rabbi," or even simply, "The Word became a Man"? No, evidently only one word is adequate, "Flesh!" Can we discover the reasons?

It is the Coarsest Term

It is the word most opposed to that definition of God that Jesus gives in the same Gospel "God is Spirit." It brings God from one extreme of the Universe of Being to the other! It seems as though the Evangelist wants to make us feel that now God is no longer unseen and spiritual merely. He has invaded the sphere of the seen and material for their redemption. He can now be touched

and handled. God is flesh now as well as spirit. The great thing had happened which Browning has described so eloquently in "Saul."

O, Saul, it shall be
A face like my Face that receives thee,
A Man like me, . . . a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee !
See the Christ stand !

It is the Universal Term

We are not all philosophers, or rabbis, or men of genius, neither are we all men, but we are all "flesh." Here is a word that is understood in every continent and by every race of every colour. It leaps every barrier and speaks a language known of all.

It is the term that marks our Point of Failure, and therefore our Needed Redemption

All sin inheres in "the flesh," even the so-called sins of disposition. Bad temper is but the rise of animal passion unchecked and ungoverned. Pride is but the self-worship of the carnally minded. The flesh defeats us, not merely in the ugly lusts that the respectable shun, but in those more refined material-

isms, such as the love of ease, the love of money, the abuse of power, the worship of force, the living for an earthbound ambition which denies the reality and eternity of the soul. No wonder, then, that the Evangelist tells us, “ the Word was made *Flesh*.”

The Redeeming Fact

In this fact our common life is redeemed. It is where God is most needed that He comes to save, and our need of Him is greatest, not in the exceptional experiences of life, but in its every-dayness. The redemption Christ brings for us is not for the fringe of our life, a hobby of thought, a pastime for human leisure. It is meant to be the cleansing of our life in its every dusty corner and foulest cranny. It is the body of our human life, its earthly relationships, Christ comes to redeem. For the term “ flesh ” or “ body ” must mean not merely our physical life, but all that vast material mechanism of our social life which has come into being because we are embodied spirits working in and through a material world. Thus art and music are rooted in material mechanism, they relate to the body and appeal to its senses. Commerce and

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politics and amusement relate to the comfort, necessity, and furtherance of our life on earth. It is in these things we must be redeemed if we are to be redeemed at all. The false spirituality, therefore, that would treat religion as a hot-house plant, too delicate to affect these realms of human interest, must render it a meaningless thing for actual human life, and robs it of all appeal and urgency in the sight of earnest men.

Remember that the bulk of our life is consumed by these common things. Is God's salvation only for a corner of our existence, a portion of our time, a fragment of our experience? Surely not. Let a man say—as many do virtually, if not explicitly—that religion means one thing and business another, and it will not be long before it is evident to all the world that his real life—business—is unredeemed, and his religion is but a feeble hobby.

Christ's Spirituality

No, the religion of Jesus Christ is nothing if it is not the power of God unto salvation for everyday life, and for the whole of it. The spirituality that is too fastidious and

aloof from real life to cleanse the cesspools of social iniquity, whence the pestilences that plague mankind arise, is not the spirituality of Christ the Son of God in the flesh. It is a feeble, useless caricature. His spirituality is strong enough, pure enough, to ceaselessly project itself upon real life, a consuming fire turning the earthy and the fleshly to the uses of the soul.

Let us be quite convinced concerning this earthly life of ours that only one of two things can happen at any time. Either the Word of God is made flesh, or the word of the Devil must be.

Divorce between Religion and Real Life

Never was there a time like the present, when the Church so needed to grip this central fact. The truly awful divorce between religion and real life has found its most terrible evidence in the Great War.

What of the sacredness of the human body now? I confess that one of the supreme horrors of war has become, for me, the shocking indignity it means to the human body. Think of the fair and beautiful and matchless frames of glorious youth, those

temples of the Holy Ghost, shattered and maimed, and rent into bloody fragments. This marvellous mechanism, so "fearfully and wonderfully made," the offspring of the Creator, by long ages of burning worlds, long successions of living forms, long generations of toiling humans, honoured and sanctified at last as the abode of the Eternal Son, *is blown to pieces*. That is war, and war is bred by politics, an everyday concern, a theme for newspapers but not for pulpits, and by commerce, something different from religion !

Do we not also realise now, more than ever before, that lust treats this body, sanctified by the Incarnation, even worse than war ? Is it not patent at last to all that Purity is the very foundation - virtue of human society and well-being ? Even the direct attacks of barbaric foes are not so fatal to a nation's life as are the insidious attacks of immorality, and the deadly foul diseases it inevitably breeds.

The use we make of the body, this is the test-question of life for the embodied soul. Here is the arena where we are to win our spiritual knighthood, if we are ever to win it here.

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The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man,
And the man said, "Am I your debtor?"
And the Lord—"Not yet; but make it as clean as
you can,
And then I will let you a better."

And in the light of these self-evident facts
is it not everything to us that God stepped
down from His throne in the depth of the
vast invisible

From the highest throne of glory
To the cross of deepest woe?

That He cumbered Himself with our "sinful
flesh," and in it fought and conquered and
revealed the Sinless Life under all our handi-
caps?

"Who shall deliver me," cries Paul, "from
the body of this death?" Who, indeed, but
a God made flesh, a God Who understands,
knows, and has become real with just that
sort of material, vivid, tangible reality which
is the very strength of my fleshly and material
temptations?

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for!
My flesh, that I seek in the Godhead!
I seek and I find it
See, the Christ stand!

Lord of the Trivial Round

And how perfectly Jesus dominates our common life ! From cradle to grave it is the common highway He travels, the common life and people that He seeks. As one has truly said, "Wherever He comes, He comes in such a way as to rebuke pride and exalt the lowly and meek." He comes to break down the gulf between the Exceptional God and man's Everyday life.

When He came to Bethlehem He came as a "babe" laid in a cattle-trough, crowded out of the Inn.

When He came to Nazareth, it was as a carpenter, the son of Joseph and Mary. When He came to Sychar, it was as the weary footworn traveller. When He came to Jerusalem, it was in meekness, riding upon an ass, to hallow in the perpetual remembrance of His followers the daily bread of the common meal, and to wash the disciples' feet. When He came to Calvary, it was as a common outcast, bleeding and fainting. When, risen with newness of life and power, He came to Galilee, it was to bake fish upon a fire of coals on the sea-shore at daybreak,

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and to say to His disciples, "Come and dine."

And this was God! Is it not true that Jesus has touched with heavenly lustre for evermore "the trivial round, the common task?" He has redeemed our common life. Let us therefore yield it up to Him.

He has proved Himself King of it by living through it all, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Our beloved Captain, though Lord of All, chose to rise from the ranks. Shall He not lead us?

Here lies His true worship. Not in temple ceremonies, but in the cup of cold water, offered in His spirit. Not in quiet devotions that have no aim but a selfish piety, but in a consecration of the life we now live in flesh. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, *to receive the things done in the body*, whether good or ill." Let Jesus hallow for us every interest, every moment, every part of our life, and then at last we shall be able to complete that poem of Tennyson's just quoted, with perfect truth of ourselves:

I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last,
As he stands on the heights of his life,
With a glimpse of a height that is higher.

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In the Roman Catholic Church they celebrate a daily mass, which represents the perpetual offering to God of our Lord's holy sacrifice. It has its beautiful meaning, that mass, but is there not a better? A daily mass, indeed—the Spirit of Jesus so ruling in our bodily life that it is offered unto God by Him daily. It is by this sign we conquer—"a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger"—a body broken on a cross, the Spirit still victorious—the Word of God made *flesh* and lifting our humanity hour by hour to the right hand of God, for His holy uses, for His great redeeming purpose. This is the true Catholic mass, the redemption of our common daily life.

VIII

Wkq 24

DOUBT

IN the ninth chapter of his Gospel St. Mark has preserved for us the story of one of the quaintest and yet most profound prayers that ever fell from human lips. "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief."

Here is a soul overcoming its inability to trust by sheer force of will, by a desperate rallying of all secret urgings to faith. With this paradox upon his lips, divided as he is between diffidence and boldness, despair and hope, faith and faithlessness, the man is typical of some people in every generation, and of a very large number in these present days. Under the pressure of recent events the faith of many has been severely tested and strained, and some seem to find "faith"

almost impossible. Many at the best can only pray a prayer like this—compounded of opposites—breathing trust and unbelief in one breath. Yet an examination of the story will show how much wisdom there is in such a petition ; how much more faith than unbelief.

The Effect of Suffering upon Faith

The father of the lunatic boy was faced by one of the most terrible tragedies any man can suffer. Those who know the quite peculiar nature of the passion of a father's love towards his son will understand that to find one's boy afflicted in mind—with reason and body both in recurring peril—must be one of the bitterest of human griefs. The poor fellow was up against one of the ultimate forms of suffering.

There are certain ultimate sorrows which, once a soul has met them closely, render one a past-master in the experience of pain, a graduate of the university of grief. Those ultimate sorrows are, I think, three, and I put them in the descending degrees of horror : Sin, Madness, and Death, including the approach to death, the long, losing battle for

health and life that so often accompanies it. When these have come close to one in one's nearest and dearest, there seems nothing left in God's universe that could be more painful. The gamut of sorrow has been run, the limit of one's endurance reached. Just there, however, at that point of ultimate grief, there should come the great rediscovery of life, the end of sorrow and the beginning of joy, the exhaustion of doubt and the re-birth of faith.

It was at such a point of supreme crisis that this man stood. He had tried every remedy for his boy without avail. Last of all he had brought him to the disciples of the great Nazarene Healer, and now they too had failed him. Beneath the blow of that disappointment his faith is hard to rally anew, and he answers Jesus very diffidently. His power of faith has been crushed by the weight of his woe, tested to the straining and breaking point. At Christ's fresh demand for "faith" his composure breaks down, the desperate desire of his soul bursts up through his sense of impotence and hopelessness, and he confesses simultaneously, his unbelief, and his determination to believe. The result was

surprising. It was peace and power, and a trust that doubtless was never seriously disturbed again.

Now I venture to assert that this is the *invariable* effect of suffering upon human faith. It tests it to the utmost, strains it to the breaking point, with the effect, finally, of re-establishing the soul in a hope that maketh not ashamed. That final effect is delayed in many lives, but it must come sooner or later. There are exceptions, of course, such as those whose faith seems unclouded and untested by any circumstance. That may be, however, an unenviable condition. It may be due to inexperience of life, and therefore immaturity of faith. Only when it is the result of such testing as we have described is unclouded faith a matter for congratulation. Even our Lord was made perfect through suffering ; even He was subject to the supreme test ; who of us, then, may hope or desire to escape ?

I claim, therefore, that the results of suffering as regards faith are never utterly bad. They are often represented as being fatal to faith. "Look," we are told, "at the large number of people who grow bitter and hard

as a result of suffering." "Mark how some souls become obsessed by the pain and grief of human life, till their trust in the goodness of God is shaken to its foundations!" Exactly so, but is such an effect entirely bad? *If a soul's trust in God can be shaken, ought it not to be shaken?* If my house is built on insecure foundations *the sooner and the more thoroughly I discover it the better.* It is my only hope of ever building a house that can stand for ever.

Ill-founded Faith

Now suffering and sorrow operate—as nothing else could—as a *thoroughgoing test* for the foundations of our house of life, and we must confess how ill-founded it discovers the faith of many of us to be. Nor can one be surprised at that. Think of the utter carelessness of hosts of our English people concerning God and immortality and goodness in the days before the War. How eaten out was the nation's heart with frivolity and the worship of mammon! How utterly unprepared we were for the sudden strain of this war upon faith and hope! When the great test falls suddenly upon a generation singularly

neglectful of God, singularly engrossed with the material interests of life, it is not surprising to find the house of faith everywhere toppling to the ground. But that is to the good—it reveals the paltriness of our building.

What is more saddening, however, is to find how many Christian people have been building their lives upon a faith that was purely of the "fair weather" quality. Do we trust our Pilot only as He sails our bark through sunny seas? Shall we cease to trust Him when the seas grow stormy and the skies grow dark? Shall we turn and rend Him with our dark suspicions on the one voyage in which *we need Him most*, and which we cannot hope to navigate successfully without Him? *If we are such Christians the sooner we know it the better*, that we may repent and turn to Him with a trust that really honours Him and meets our own need.

Because, then, suffering tests faith, we may find in doubt a matter for rejoicing. It reveals the test of work, and if it also reveals a failure to stand the test, even then it is so much gained of that self-knowledge which, Tennyson reminds us, is an element in Sovereign Power. This is why I am glad to

hear people confess doubt, if they are really honest. It means they are at least in the grip of a great fact, that their faith needs re-founding. This is the first great step, and the more desperate the condition of the soul the more bitter and hard and estranged it becomes in tribulation, the nearer it comes to the great triumphant re-action ; extremes meet, the heart that hardens reaches a point at last where it grows brittle, and breaks, and begins life anew. The process may be long, it is often artificially and wilfully prolonged, but its issue is without doubt, the natures of man and God being what they are.

Suffering is the great call to the soul to prove its faith—not to discard it. It is the test of faith, not its destruction, for faith in the last resort is the gift of God. Like hope, it springs eternal in the human breast.

This fact brings us to the second element in the story before us.

The Demand of Life for Faith

The father of the lunatic boy was in the grip of a great need. Life was impossible to him without faith, yet there seemed no help or use in faith. To give up all hope of his

boy's recovery, to lose faith entirely, to cease utterly to believe, this would be a living death—the sun of his life would be quenched. And what is life ever without faith, but that ? The demand Jesus makes for this man's faith is not arbitrary. It is part of the larger demand that life, and therefore the Lord of life, makes upon us all.

This demand is an absolute demand. Till it is met life cannot go on—it wavers and wanes and gives place to the forces of death and decay. Humanity in the course of history has suffered agony beyond description, yet that is not the greatest fact. Not suffering but *survival* is the greatest fact, and the one greatest factor in that miraculous survival of the race has been man's amazing capacity for faith and hope. It is the one thing that has brought the race through, it is the secret of its vitality.

The individual life reveals just the same fundamental need for faith. Watch the soul whose faith is decaying, or has been shaken, and you will see how impossible it is for that soul to remain long in the discomfort and pain of chronic doubt.

Herein, of course, lurks a danger. The

peril of too easy and hasty a surrender to the desire for peace and comfort. Again and again a soul hard pressed by doubts has fled for refuge to an extreme of blind credulity and superstition, and to the wilful acceptance of any dogma, however unreasonable. This snuffing out of the intellect is an unworthy way of escape, and we need to recognise the virtue of those who will not make their judgment blind, who suffer the pain and confusion of doubt patiently and perseveringly until the time of illumination arrives. Nowhere does Christ require of us the subjection of our intellect to dogmatic authority. Remember His stern challenge to the Pharisees, "Wherefore judge ye not for yourselves what is right ?" Christ respects that passion for truth which is the only true orthodoxy, and in their very doubt some people come nearer to Him than others in their so-called faith.

But the fact that life, to be lived worthily, demands " faith " is a great blow to doubt, and nothing healthier for the doubting soul can occur than to feel to the full this challenge of life. Try the effect of turning your "doubt" into a creed of life. Try to *live* the "doubt" you harbour in the mind—

doubt so thoroughly that you must act out your doubt, and you will find at once how utterly dependent good life is on faith.

The trouble with most doubters is not that they doubt, but that they doubt insufficiently. *They never face up to life as it would be if their doubts were true.* Turn your doubts into a creed and say, "I believe in a God of Hate," and then picture life built on such a creed ! If you doubt love as fundamental to life, why go on loving as you do ? Why keep the gentle heart, if the heart of the Universe is cruel ? Really believe your doubt, and you will find love and gentleness depreciated, and yet nevertheless strangely persistent. There will be a strange irony in your position. For the sake of truth you must deny love, yet you are constantly struggling in your practical life to be unselfish, kindly, loving. You find it hard, nay, really impossible to fasten your dismal creed upon life—*life itself fights for faith.*

The Soul's Secret Faith

Thus we come to what may be called *the secret faith of the soul*—the faith that constantly asserts itself in spite of ourselves.

The man of this story found it impossible to deny the passionate longing of his soul for his boy's recovery, it rose like a flood-tide above the impotence of faith, and burst forth in this great appeal to Christ, which reveals "faith beyond the forms of faith." "Lord, *I believe*, help Thou mine unbelief."

It is always so. It is well-nigh impossible for any soul to become finally and seriously pessimistic. When it does so, the reason gives way, and suicide becomes the logical and often the actual result. Life cannot really go on without faith. If you doubt and live, it is because of some secret root of faith which you may not acknowledge, but which betrays its existence every time you enjoy life in any degree, or at any point. Let me repeat, our doubt is not thoroughgoing enough, it does not bring us to the point where we see ourselves *finding a problem in goodness rather than in evil*. Sir Oliver Lodge has pointed out that if the universe were fundamentally evil we should go about wondering at goodness, chuckling over calamity, finding death gratifying, proving ourselves fiends, and not strugglers after joy and goodness at all.

If God is not Love, then why this surging cry from a father's heart, this white-hot passion for his son's welfare, this clamour at the throne of Divine Power for the blessing without which life is dust and ashes ? In other words, how explain love at the heart of humanity, if love did not build humanity ? How explain hope ever lifting up its head above despair, hope springing eternal at the root of being, if One reigns above Who for ever denies it ?

Do you remember how H. G. Wells expresses, in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, this supreme testimony of human love to Love on the Throne of Being ? Mr. Britling says, " If there were nothing else in all the world but the love that made you weep, or the love I bear Hugh—if there was nothing else at all—if everything else was cruelty, it would still be certain that there was a God of love and righteousness."

There is in all mankind a preference, secret where not avowed, for love and truth and justice as being better than hate, falsehood, and inequity, and that preference has to be explained. Beneath all your doubting your soul clings secretly to hope. In some

desperate crisis of life your soul will launch itself with the courage of despair upon the ocean of desire, and your secret faith will then reveal itself as fed from the fountain-head of God's own Spirit. Just as this man found a reserve of faith in the will to believe, so you may find it too. "The soul opens inwardly upon God."

This secret urge of faith, this hope that springs up beneath every weight of despair can be explained only by the contact of the soul with One greater than itself. "We have not to ascend, to bring Christ down from above, nor to descend, to bring Him up from below. The word is nigh thee in thy heart and in thy mouth."

So we are led to

The Divine Helper of our Unbelief

The supreme consideration to be put to the doubting soul is this, that in all this matter one is dealing, not with a scheme of forces, not with a universe of laws, not with a Cosmic Infinite—how cold such terms leave us—but with a Living God, a Person in Whose Image our being is cast. The problem of doubt or faith is no mere intellectual

interest. It is not an abstract question, it is an intensely *personal* matter. It concerns two friends, yourself and God. God has come to men in the warm personal form of a fellow-man, and the desire He expresses through Christ for your trust is the most natural in all the world.

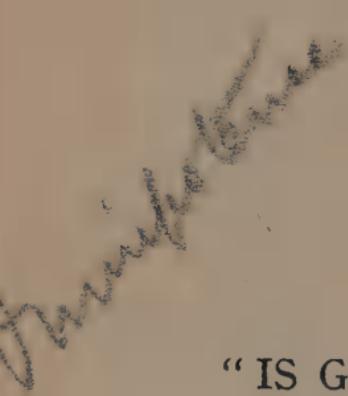
And I prefer the word " trust " to " belief." Belief has become so theological for us. " Trust," thank God, still remains practical. Some one has illustrated the difference by saying that you may " believe " in the power of an arm-chair to support you, *but you don't trust it till you are sitting in it.* Christ asks you to give yourself up to Him—just as you are—questions, doubts, problems, and all. It is a pact of friendship, the sort of thing that must happen between two persons if they mean to be friends. No friendship can thrive except on the basis of faith, but on that basis friendship develops. It is in just that way that the faith of Jesus becomes increasingly the faith of His disciples.

After all, the one great dependable fact of history is that out of the " Unseen " that you so much doubt has come *this Man*, whose love, truth, and purity are an impregnable

rock for human trust. When the soul takes Him as *the Truth about God*, then it begins to build the house of life upon a rock indeed, and not all the storms that ever raged can disturb it. There has been no "helper of our unbelief" like Jesus. He is indeed "the author and the perfecter of our faith."

The belief of Christians is that Jesus Christ is Himself directly available for our spiritual help. The doubting soul should try the truth of that belief by making his own appeal to Him. If he cannot begin with the risen and glorified Lord, let him begin with the Teacher of Nazareth and Galilee. Make association with Jesus and see where He leads.

Let the soul that doubts make this man's prayer his own. See how he comes past all the failing disciples to the Master Himself! Shall I not do the same? See how he comes past himself, *past his own weakness of faith and failure of trust*. "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief." Just so will I come past the world, past the Church, past myself, bringing my doubt to Him Who can alone truly answer it.



IX

“ IS GOD OMNIPOTENT ? ”

A WOMAN once asked her husband, who was a very business-like man, whether it could be true that God is immanent in us all. She received the rather curt reply, “ Oh ! I suppose so, but really it doesn’t matter very much.”

That answer reflects aptly the pre-war attitude of many minds towards theological questions. To the man in the street they did not seem to matter very much. Even since the War there has been a tendency to discredit theology. There is a change of emphasis however. Before the War it was a lack of interest in theology itself. Since the War the objection is not to theology so much as to its academic statement and presentation.

A Supreme Factor in Life

Men and women everywhere are awaking to the profound significance of the character given to God in human thought. They are seeing clearly enough that a nation is made or marred by the object of its supreme devotion. The lurid light of battle has revealed the fact that a theory of the State which shuts out God and His moral character can make nothing of the world but a shambles. We are realising that the supreme factor in our life after all is the character of God. Man is made by his image of God. Tossed on the stormy sea of a world at war, the soul must find an anchorage in God or go down to disaster and despair. Many a life can now go on living only by the grace of some beautiful thought of God which keeps faith and hope alive in the breast. Hence the old theological questions, “ Does God care ? ” “ Can he save ? ” “ Did He come in Jesus Christ ? ” “ Is He omnipotent ? ” are being asked with a new solemnity and an intense passion to know. *But* there must be no jargon of the schools in our reply—no uncertainty, save that which is reasonable before so holy a mystery—no

artificial obscurity of language. The plain man wants a plain answer to a plain question.

For this reason let me state at once the reply I feel able to give to this question. A plain straightforward and reasonable reply.

Is God omnipotent ? Yes, but His omnipotence is in process of changing its form—from that of law to that of grace.

What is Omnipotence ?

God is Omnipotent. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to think of Him as otherwise. Should He be less He cannot be the Ultimate Being, but only demi-god. When we speak of God, unless we desire to use terms idly, we must mean the Adequate First Cause of all Existence, Himself without cause or dominance from any other source. Unless God is All-powerful He is not God, and instinctively the human heart can find no use for a God Who is less than that. We all know how constantly during the War men and women have asked, Why doesn't God interfere ? Why doesn't He stop the slaughter and enforce peace ? And under the stress of the fact that God has not dealt summarily with the situation, many earnest souls have felt themselves

caught in the ghastly dilemma that John Stuart Mill voiced when he claimed that God was either benevolent, but not powerful enough, or if He were powerful enough, He could not be benevolent.

People have felt obliged to choose between an Impotent and a Wicked God. The curious thing, however, is this, that as soon as the soul reaches that position with any degree of conviction God's spell over it is gone. He ceases to have really serious meaning for life. Worship, prayer, and redemptive hope begin to decay. We have no use for a God Who is not Omnipotent.

But does not the stupendous demonstration of power in the material universe accord with this instinctive demand for a God Who is able? Think of the power that could swing our sun into space and keep it there, burning already for twenty-six million years, the scientists tell us; flinging its golden beams ninety-three million miles to warm into life the wonders of our little planet, and especially the supreme wonder, man himself. Wherever we look into the vast abyss of space we see further and still further spectacles of similar power, and who can tell whether this

may not be but one universe of a myriad others ? The microscope shows us worlds *within* worlds till the mind is awed by the overwhelming majesty of Being, and our thought of God takes up naturally and irresistibly such words as omnipotent, infinite, eternal.

To such a Being, considered as mere power, it were a little thing to kick over our wicked little human world as a man kicks an ant-hill out of his way. With the greatest ease He might take us all in the hollow of His hand and scatter us as dust before the wind. It is obvious that if He wanted to *make* us good, if it were a desirable and right and loving thing to do, He could do it in the twinkling of an eye. Who dare refuse the Creator of this universe of blazing golden worlds ? The power of God cannot be gainsaid. He is omnipotent.

Yet the fact remains that we cannot think of God as mere power. We may fear, but we cannot admire, much less worship Power only. Indeed, we commonly pity it. If God is blind power, He is infinitely less than man. The clumsy giant is a theme for nursery tales. The old story of the elephant that tried to

help his friend the hen by hatching her eggs, with disastrous results, is a case in point. God is not God in virtue of sheer power.

This raises the question, What can omnipotence mean when used of a person ? Can it mean the power to do anything ? The power, for example, to do wrong, or to do foolishly ? Or to achieve contradictions ? One recalls some children’s questions : “ Can God make a stone He cannot lift ? ” “ Can God make a window open and shut at the same time ? ” It is well to remember that such questions are essentially childish. They ask that God should cease to be God, a God of order and intelligence, and become a celestial juggler. That is precisely what our insistent demand for miracle, *without relation to moral factors*, often comes to. The all-mightiness of God is never anywhere in the New Testament put forward as His chief glory. It is taken for granted that He is omnipotent, but never do we read, God is power, but only God is spirit, God is love, God is light.

What, then, do we mean by omnipotence in a person ? Simply that *God can do whatever He purposes to do*. It does not and cannot mean that He will do everything, because

everything may not appeal to His will, but all that He has a will to do He can achieve. He is not mere violence, *His power travels along the channel of His desire and purpose.*

God's Awful¹ Restraint

This purpose being one of grace and not of law necessitates *the omnipotent restraint of power.* The teaching of Jesus prevents our ascribing to God a character less than the best. Under its influence we exalt above God as Creator and Sovereign Power, the conception of God as Father and Friend. He seeks to lead His human children out of the bondage of fear and of a mere formal legal obedience to Him into the freedom of a family relationship, the glad co-operation of those who freely choose His will. His kingdom is a kingdom of grace and not of law.

That ought to be quite simple and easy for us to grasp. This change in the form of power is happening continually in our homes. Whilst the children are young we do many things for them that older children must learn to do for themselves. They are under our

¹ Perhaps this word could be well spelled here AWEFUL. *Vide* Dr. Orchard's *The Theology of Jesus* for a precedent.

power in a more legal way, with more of the element of sheer force in it, than at a later age. As they get older more and more the power parental takes a more gracious form. The growing will must not be crowded by the will that gave it birth into the world. Instead of commands, like the Decalogue, we now have recommendations like the Beatitudes, and appeals like the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of St. John. And do we not know that for parental power to fail in making this “change of form,” or to fail to respect it very completely, is for the parental purpose to stultify itself and for the home to be broken up. Do we think the father less powerful who rules his household by the form of grace, winning a whole-hearted obedience, than the man who has to crush the wills of his family, his wife's included often, to get his way? Do we not recognise in that rule of grace, that noble restraint of self-assertion, a further refinement of power, a greater attainment, and not a less.

I confess that greater even than the impression made on me by His power expressed in nature, is the impression made by God's *awful restraint of Himself before the fact of*

human sin. That, I take it, is the meaning of the Cross of Christ. We are to be saved by grace, *grace that costs all that*, to God, because no other salvation is genuine or worth attempting.

Why cannot we perceive that this restraint is the supreme triumph of God's Power? Who can curb the Power of God? Only God Himself.

It is said of William the Silent, that passionate lover of liberty and humanity, that his amazing strength of character was evidenced in nothing so much as in his quiet adherence as long as possible to "the more excellent way" of constitutional agitation against the tyranny of Spain, in spite of the agony he endured in witnessing the carnage wrought by the Holy Inquisition, and the awful sufferings of an outraged and persecuted people. His power was shown greatest in restraint.

Those who have read *Quo Vadis?* will recall to mind the slave Ursus, and his defence of his mistress, Lygia—how he seized in his mighty grip the insolent young Roman noble, Marcus, and with the greatest ease could have crushed the life from him. All the more

impressive therefore to Marcus was this barbarian's power in that his Christian beliefs enabled him to restrain his ferocity and withhold the full weight of his strength. Power was perfected in restraint.

There is no virtue in power uncontrolled. A person may easily be the victim of his own strength, in work, for example, that requires delicacy of treatment. It is the glory of the great steam hammer that not only can it smash the rock at a blow, but it can also crack a nut so perfectly as not to damage the kernel. So God's omnipotence is in no instance so manifest as in its exquisite adjustment to the varying and complicated human problem and to the extremely delicate character of moral issues. God has before Him the delicate problem of not crowding the growing freedom of man. The problem not merely of standing off Browning's “ hair-breadth to leave room for the newly-made to live,” but of increasing the distance as man ceases to be a child and approaches more and more “ the stature of the perfect man.”

The older humanity becomes, the more capable of social co-operation, the more responsible can we expect God to hold man,

and the less intervention of the arbitrary kind can we expect. For it is a "family" of free sons and daughters educated in His own powers that God aims at making, and a "family" is not made perfect by law, but only by grace.

The Return of Power

Hence we discern the glory and responsibility of God's gift of life to man.

There is in the Psalms a sentence which perfectly expresses the situation. "Thy gentleness" ("thy restraint") "hath made me great." This omnipotence of restraint, which at times costs humanity so dear, which involves so often the permission of terrible evil and disaster, is our only opportunity of *real* life and dignity. It is the price of our greatness. The only alternative would be the degrading of our manhood into machinery. To be "made perfect as a thing of course," to be bludgeoned into obedience, would be an achievement unworthy of God, and of infinite loss to man. Phil May, in one of his cartoons, depicts a London coster out for the day on Hampstead Heath with his little boy. The man is boxing the child's

ear, with the injunction, “ Be ‘appy, can’t yer ! ” Funny as it is, the picture perfectly expresses the solemn truth that the blessedness of the human spirit must spring spontaneously from an inward grace, and can never be imposed upon the soul by outward force.

But what ample and wonderful compensation we have for that apparent limitation. It means that when joy comes it is *real* joy, when obedience comes it is *real* obedience, when good triumphs in human life it is a triumph in which man is permitted a *real* share by God.

It means that God prefers to be our soul’s companion to being our task-master. He comes nearer to us for His costly choice of Fatherhood, and His refusal of arbitrary sovereignty. “ God dealeth with you as with sons,” and who of us in his heart of hearts would have it otherwise ?

God then has delegated to His vast human family real life, real power. They are able to say Him “ nay,” as well as “ yes.” Yet in this He does not cease to be omnipotent, for it happens by His own almighty grace. Nevertheless, He asks you and me for the

return of that power. He seeks His own again in service freely rendered, in co-operation scrupulously maintained. He cannot make His family without their consent, for the simple reason that "He cannot deny Himself," as Paul says. He cannot choose a purpose and then surrender it. Did He do so, He would indeed cease to be omnipotent. Consequently, His recourse is to the method of appeal. And what an appeal ! Jesus Christ, the supreme love of human history, suffering down the enmity of the world, bearing its sin rather than break the human will, and yet winning to Himself an ever-increasing following, becoming the Head of a new humanity which seeks to render a perfect free obedience to God ! Is He not indeed the Appeal of God for the consecration back to Him of the power that is in you and me ?

So God in creation, as it were, put His power out to the sweet usury of love, hoping to receive it again with compound interest in a humanity whose whole heart and soul is freely given to virtue, and which is wholly one in spirit with Himself.

Shall we lay hold upon our "greatness" by becoming free instruments of His power in

the world ? Wherever men heartily co-operate with God war gives place to peace, disease to health, chaos to order, ugliness to beauty, death to life ; sin and all its train of unholy mischief yields place to love and truth and right. God does not fail humanity ever. Neither is He slack. All His omnipotence is exerted to make humanity great. God's *gentleness* is the supreme demonstration of His power.

X

THE MORAL PERFECTION OF JESUS

THERE are two great reasons for our belief in the sinlessness of our Lord. There is the testimony of the New Testament and the testimony of the New Humanity. In the New Testament we mark an entire absence of any record of evil concerning Jesus. There are several positive and direct claims on His own part to sinlessness. We find also several distinct assertions by the apostolic writers to the same effect. Above all, there is what has been called the "impenitence" of Jesus—the utter absence from His language and consciousness of any trace of penitence or confession. He, whose moral demands are the most stringent ever made upon humanity, Who was Himself more sensitive than all others to the exceeding sinfulness of sin, Who produced in His disciples an unprecedented

passion for holiness, never Himself confessed to a fault nor led the way in confession or contrition. Such a paradox is not to be found elsewhere in history, and it can only have one adequate solution—Jesus had nought of which to be ashamed—He did always the things that pleased the Father.

The testimony of the new humanity harmonises with the Gospel record. Men in all centuries since have found in Jesus a Saviour from sin, and to that result His sinlessness has been vital. The common judgment of the saints throughout the ages has been that He, Who was tried in all points like as we are, yet without sin—has been able to succour them that are tempted, and to that ability *His being without sin was essential*. Christ has been busy producing a new humanity—a humanity increasingly free from sin. This temple of a new humanity has been built upon the foundation of a Sinless Saviour. Had but one flaw in the character of our Lord been discoverable that temple would have collapsed. We are face to face with a gigantic and continuous witness to the sinlessness of Christ in this constant testimony of the humanity which in Him has become newly

created. We feel it legitimate to claim this witness as the continued testimony of Christ's own Spirit to His moral perfection. It is the aim of the present essay to discover something of the "content" of this Moral perfection of Jesus.

A Thrilling Achievement

The "sinlessness" of Jesus is a grandly positive thing.

We frequently hear complaint made of the term "sinlessness" as being too negative and implying merely abstention from evil. This word "sinlessness," however, is very far from being a negative term. It is the word "Sin" which everywhere in the New Testament bears this "negative" implication. To sin is to *miss the mark*, but to be sinless is therefore to *hit the mark*. Sinlessness is achievement, conquest, victory. Consequently the picture of Jesus presented in the Gospels is not that of an ascetic. Jesus does not go through life simply abstaining from sin—he *goes about doing* good. He is a warrior upon campaign. He has a work to accomplish. We must put into that word "Sinless" its true meaning. It means a

world-moving, hell-shaking triumph—a thrilling victory. Mark the story of conflict in the wilderness, of stress and strain at successive crises, the triumphant assertion, "I have overcome the world," the glorious cry of relief from the cross, "It is finished," and you cannot escape the positive nature of the moral achievement of Jesus. Christ is God's warrior fighting in the van of the fight the deadliest fight, and winning victory complete and enduring.

The positive nature of Christ's Perfection of Character becomes still more impressive as we consider that it is moral, comprehensive, and redemptive.

Choice and Struggle

The Perfection of Jesus is moral. That means it is the result of choice and struggle. Christ's relationship to our humanity is real. He did not *pretend* to become a man, nor did He become an *artificial* man. He became really an individualised soul, a man of the Jewish race, and of that particular age, sharing the limitations of that age in large measure, excepting His unique moral triumph and the enlargement of powers which

such an achievement must have brought with it.

That no other view of the Jesus of the Gospel record is possible is evident to all who will carefully study its pages. The reality of Christ's manhood is stamped upon every page. The temptations in the wilderness have no meaning unless He was really tried like as we are—though without sin. What mean His long night vigils in prayer unless He needed to pray ? His constant assertion of dependence upon God, His troubled condition of soul at various crises of temptation (as at Peter's suggestion that the Messiah could never suffer, and at the meeting with the Greeks), the experience of Gethsemane, all these traits in the Gospel story of Jesus compel us to believe in the absolute reality of His manhood and the "moral" nature of the perfect goodness that He achieved.

This moral element in the Perfection of Jesus is essential to His work as Saviour. If we so interpret His Godhead as to make His sinlessness an entirely foregone conclusion—something that could be so without His personal interest and responsibility—if Jesus was just "made perfect as a thing of course,"

then He is hopelessly removed from men. He becomes then our Reproach and Judge, but is no longer our Saviour. Knowing nothing from experience of our struggle, He does not really know us and cannot lead us. So viewed, instead of making us feel the reality of His love and the genuineness of His interest in us, His sacrifice is glossed over with pretence and unreality.

No, somehow Almighty God, *by a self-retraction possible only to Omnipotence*, brought Himself under our conditions so that, as a man among men, He might live our life, and bear our burden and so come into perfect union with mankind.

Christ really took upon Himself the same conditions that handicap us in our race, and so handicapped He nevertheless won the race. Christ fought our fight and every time He entered into battle He came forth victor. He held His perfection by conflict and struggle, but by successful struggle. His perfection was moral and therefore we are able to hail Him as Saviour, believing that His victory is the earnest of the victory of those who follow Him.

The Hero of all Peoples

His Perfection is comprehensive. Mankind by vast hosts of its members has spent its imagination prodigally for centuries in the adoration of Jesus—and is not tired of Him. Democracies of the old and the new worlds may tire of His ministers, of His disciples, of His Church, they do not grow tired of Him. There is something in Jesus utterly and entirely satisfying for the most varied types of human souls. His name is known now in every continent, and His power *to save by satisfying* is being proved daily amongst so many varied peoples as to provide a demonstration of Christ's universality previously impossible.

How marvellous must that Hero be Who can satisfy the soul-hunger for perfect character in, literally, all manner of peoples ! Here truly is the *greatness* of our Lord—He is so wonderfully comprehensive in His moral appeal. Furthermore, His character is comprehensive of all virtues. His Personality is full-orbed.

Wisdom and Simplicity

The "wizardry" of His words has been the wonder of History. No man has spoken like this man. "He spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes." Such light did He pour into the souls of His hearers that they knew good from evil as never before, and knew also that in refusing Him they chose darkness rather than light. The modern world, with all its astounding advance in knowledge and scientific method, can make no improvement upon His ethic, but instead is judging itself and all its boasted progress by the Seer of Galilee. Herbert Spencer, one of the greatest of our philosophers, worked out his own system of perfect ethics and came solemnly and with some pomp to the conclusion that altruism must be tempered by a sane egoism. This was the quintessence of nineteenth-century moral science. Yet Jesus, two thousand years ago, endorsed as the second greatest commandment, "Love thy neighbour as thyself"!

And yet withal Jesus is so simple. Profound always, but always transparently simple. There is no elaborate argument—

no intellectual atmosphere of the schools about Him. His words amazed the Pharisees in view of the impression He also made of "never having learned." A Rabbi indeed, but strangely free of Rabbinism—instead, a wayfaring man with no place to lay his head—teaching the people or His disciples by means of short pithy statements of truth or homely parable and illustration, so full of wisdom, and of such crystal clearness that the world is still considering and re-considering them though nearly 2000 years have passed.

About this man of such strangely clear vision there was a childlikeness which made the children His friends so that they came to Him for blessing, and what a marvellous combination of profundity and simplicity there is to be found in His teaching the adult disciple by means of a child in their midst.

Building no systematic philosophy, writing no book, forming no definite organisation, living as one of the common people, showing a passionate trust in God and man, and at last meekly bearing the onslaught of His foes, the Crucified is able to place His hands on both the wise and the simple. He brings together the learned and the unlearned

in an undreamt-of sympathy, revealing to each a wisdom of the heart more profound than all intellectual philosophies. Those arms of love embrace the extremes of mankind. In Him Who is the true and living Way, the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err, and the wisest philosopher finds ever new food for thought and an inexhaustible store of wisdom.

His Gentleness and Severity

The greatest sayings of our Lord reveal a wonderful protecting gentleness. "Come unto Me, ye weary." "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." We feel, as we follow the Gospel story, how true it is to say of Him, "The smoking flax He will not quench, the bruised reed He will not break." See Him dealing with individual souls ; with Nicodemus, gentle in His very severity ; with the woman of Samaria showing the most delicate tact ; with the woman who was a sinner, gently but so strongly defending her from the cruel contempt of the Pharisee ; with Peter after the tragedy. If such was His method with sinners is it any wonder that sinners

thronged to hear Him ? Study His parables —the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, and you will feel an infinite tenderness grip your heart.

And yet from that brow could flash lightnings of pure judgment. The Man Who *alone* could cast forth the money-changers from the Temple by the simple impetus of His righteous anger must have been one in Whom dwelt perfectly that Divine wrath which is the necessary counterpart of Divine love. It was meet that He Who perfectly revealed the Father should reveal also “the consuming fire.” Hear His defence of the children and mark the terrible white heat of His words. Hear Him in one moment cry, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah,” and in the very next “Get thee behind Me, Satan !” What a sudden transition from exquisite gentleness to rocklike severity, yet both moods were demanded by His perfect devotion to love. He who drew sinners to Himself by cords of gentleness dealt as faithfully with the Pharisees, fiercely denouncing their sin.

Here we find a Perfect Love at last. Indulgent where indulgence can profit those

who are loved, firm where firmness alone is good—a love tender enough to shelter the maimed and penitent of mankind and strong enough to fight the forces of evil at their worst—a love so gloriously strong as to be able to bear the Cross for the souls alike of outcast and hypocrite.

Dignity and Humility

This Man makes claims which on other lips would be simply outrageous. As one great scholar has said, “He carries with ease a God-consciousness which would send others toppling into insanity.” Hailed by John the Baptist as the Messiah, His confidence in His own dignity never wavers. “Upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

Where in history will you find a statement of greater courage, confidence, and calmness?

Yet claiming so much, He is always serene and humble. His way of life is with the lowly, His eyes are unto the poor. He rejoices to serve all men rather than Himself be served. He moves amongst the sick and dying, using amazing powers with utter devotion till He

is worn out in body and mind. Never will He use the prerogatives and powers of His unique relation to God for His own personal advantage. When the disciples will not wash one another's feet He stoops to perform the menial task, yet He humbles Himself with perfect dignity, declaring, "Ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am."

His Sorrow and His Joy

Jesus has brought more smiles to humanity than any one else in history. He has vastly increased the sum of human happiness—yet also He has produced the greatest amount of voluntary suffering among men. This grand reconciliation of sorrow and joy is evident in His character. The world thinks of Him chiefly as the Man of Sorrows, yet the Gospel story abounds with evidences of His joy, and gladness is stamped on every page of the New Testament.

The Gospel stories are full of banquet and of song, feasting and laughter. Jesus speaks repeatedly of His joy, and chiefly as the Cross approaches nearer—a joy which is consummated in the cry of glad relief, "It is finished."

The fact is that Jesus revealed to the world a love which can transmute suffering into the purest joy, and which imparts to the soul which will harbour that Divine Spirit an unquenchable brightness.

One of our poets, Browning, has beautifully expressed this reconciliation of joy and sorrow :

I think this is the authentic sign and seal of Godhead,
That it ever waxes glad and yet more glad,
Till it blossoms, bursts into a rage,
To suffer for mankind and re-commence at sorrow.

Thus we see Christ gathers into Himself all rays of light in human experience. Where others are but stars and moons shining with borrowed ray, He is the deep central Sun, the Source and the Fullness of all light—the Light of the World indeed.

The Living Saviour

But the *Moral Perfection of Jesus is Redemptive*. Jesus holds His glory not for Himself alone, but for you and me. The Holiest One might be expected by His Holiness and Majesty to be merely a source of terror and of judgment to sinful men. But “ this

Man receiveth sinners." This is a further miracle achieved by Jesus. *The more moral humanity becomes, and the more it learns to desire goodness and hate its sin, the more and more remote should it find a Perfectly Holy God become.* But Jesus, whilst convincing men of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, as never before, has nevertheless also succeeded in convincing men that infinite holiness is infinitely loving.

Now this is just what we miss elsewhere. Moral philosophy, for example, can describe for us the Perfect Man, but only, alas, to our condemnation and despair. Men may desert the Christian Church and join Ethical Societies, where there is a lively sense of what men ought to be, but only to find that the law of our being, abstractly contemplated, may illumine but *does not save*.

That is a pathetic story of Heine the poet which tells how he went, in spiritual anguish, to the Louvre at Paris to gaze upon that dream of loveliness, Milo's Venus, and so find comfort for his soul. But as he gazed, we are told, he suddenly realised the significance of those broken arms. His dream of Beauty was lifeless, and could hold out no hands of

help. Its beauty could only mock the soul whom it could not touch and lift. Eventually the poet found through the New Testament the Loveliness Who alone can save.

It is in Christ alone that the Ideal our souls crave comes to life and stretches forth strong hands of salvation. "He receiveth sinners." Jesus came not only to show us the Sinless One, but to show us Him as our personal living Saviour.

XI

“ TO KISS THE CROSS ”

THESE words form the last and crowning sentence of a very popular song, “The Rosary.”

It is significant of the tragedy that belongs to every life that such a song should be everybody's favourite. It has not been simply the haunting beauty of its music that has established the song in the love of the people, but much more its perfect expression of the unsatisfied yearning of the human soul. We find it a sweet pain to hear our tears in the voice of the singer and find our own story in the verses of the poet.

The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me ;
I count them over—every one apart—
My rosary, my rosary.

Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer
To still a heart in absence wrung ;
I tell each bead unto the end,
And there ! A cross is hung !

Oh, memories that bless and burn,
Oh, barren gain and bitter loss,
I tell each bead, and strive at last to learn,
Sweetheart ! ~~To~~ kiss the cross.

Could any words be more appropriate to the tragedy of this cruel war ? Just what sorrowful story they actually commemorate we do not know. Perhaps it is better so—they belong to us all. Possibly they reflect the struggle of a pure soul to fling from itself some illicit affection, and so present us with the ever-recurring calamity of human desire thwarted by divine law. Or perhaps it is the all too common catastrophe of death which makes “each pearl a prayer,” “to still a heart in absence wrung.” The song reminds one of that picture exquisitely and painfully beautiful, called “Her Cross.” The young wife is sitting at the table, her head flung upon her arms, in a tragic abandonment of grief. She holds in her hand the Victoria Cross won by her gallant but dead husband. With that cross, so dear to her,

ready to be lifted, this woman might be the very spirit of "The Rosary."

There seems to be in the song a dim perception of the ultimate beneficence of the cross. Something more, surely, than mere resignation dictated these last words. They point to some gleam of possible triumph and adequate reward beyond the grief ! The seemingly hopeless line, "Oh, barren gain and bitter loss," may express simply a passing mood of despair. In the noble determination to strive at last to learn to kiss the cross, we seem to see Love already bridging the gulf between these parted souls.

Thus the song approaches somewhat the triumph of St. Paul's great saying in Gal. vi. 14. But it only approaches it. It is a long step from the "strive at last to learn" of the song to "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross." The world may achieve a brave determination, a stoic forlorn hope, but only the religion of the Crucified can yield the paean of perfect triumph, can translate the "try" into "glory ! "

The Crucified Son of God is our perfect exemplar in this greatness of spirit. To recognise the cross, to take it up bravely,

to so believe in its beneficence and blessing, and to so overcome self as to be able "*to kiss the cross*," and at last to "*glory*" in it—this is the essential task of *every soul*, and especially is it the call which comes to men in Christ.

The Task of every Life

Somewhere along life's road, early or late, but inexorably, the will of God runs athwart your inclination and possibly your purpose. That Cross has either found you, or it awaits you.

Nothing is more certain in life than trouble, even if it be only the pangs of dissolution and the haunting doom of the grave. Why dwell on so melancholy a fact, you say? Why not? says the soul that would know life. Which is the more morbid? To be afraid to look death in the face, or to be able to do so? Is it not better to die than lose courage? But indeed it is sober truth that while every life contains great joy, it contains also at last great sorrow.

"Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Life doubtless is meant to drive us all at last to prove our loyalty to

virtue, by the price in pain and loss we are willing to pay. Unless life brings us all to that knowledge, of what conceivable use can it be ? Life is for virtue, and virtue must be tested and tried.

Divine purpose, then, together with human folly and sin, and " man's inhumanity to man " render the cross inevitable for every life.

This inevitable cross may come to us in several ways ; to some it comes in all ways.

It may be made by ourselves. We can set our wills, or permit them to drift, athwart God's will. The result is always a bitter cross. Some cherished sin holds the soul in the hideous bondage of evil habit, breaks across its harmony with God. Upon this cross our better self is crucified and done to death. Doubtless if we were perfectly honest with ourselves, this type of cross would come more into evidence. We should discover more instances than we at present realise wherein our lives cross the divine purpose, and they would occasion us greater pain. The soul at peace is scarcely to be congratulated if its peace is the stagnant complacency that is self-blinded to the ideal. The Pharisees were not crucified. They were

not therefore, however, the more happy, or the more to be admired.

Happier is the man who feels his soul to be burdened with the sins of the whole world, *if he take up his cross*. It is very terrible how some souls can cling to a sin which they know God hates ; with what sophistry they will plead for practices that are obviously alien to the mind of Christ. The love of ease, the lust for wealth, the habitual preference of self, these things continually lead men to attempt that joint service of God and Mammon which Jesus declares to be impossible. The young Ruler, we read, turned away from Christ’s great offer to life “ sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” Yet he did so, to carry surely all his life a secret *cross of shame* that must have spoilt for ever his joy in his great possessions.

If there is a cross for the soul that chooses Christ, there is also one for the soul that defrauds God and man. For many of us, doubtless, a perfect turning of our heart to God would mean the taking up of such a cross, a cross of stern and painful self-discipline and self-denial. Don’t shirk that cross ! lest a worse befall you. You may

suffer as the Son of God—with hope and glory of redemption—or you may suffer also as the thief.

Which will you, since a cross it must be ? Jesus died to inspire in men the willingness to suffer all that inward crucifixion which a strictly pure and truly godly life demands. Says St. Paul, speaking of Christ crucified, “ By Whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.” Think of the glorious self-conquest these words denote. And in that cross he gloried ! Those who would follow him and his Lord must bravely face the cost of their soul’s redemption, and “ strive at last to learn to kiss *this cross.*”

But the inevitable cross may be thrust upon us by the world.

The soul that is loyal to God can no more escape, than Jesus escaped, the persecution of the worldly-minded. If your life, by its purity and nobility, challenges the life around you, it is almost bound to mean friction and criticism. The vested interests of evil do not take the oppositions of the good lightly. Prejudice, bigotry, hypocrisy, ignorance, these forces still conspire to overthrow the honest and loving soul.

But again we may say that the absence of this cross is no reason for self-congratulation. Indeed, its absence should cause us grave concern, if we aspire to follow Christ. “ Beware,” said He, “ when all men shall speak well of you.” It is not the soldiers who “ press a closer battle ” on the foe who escape the enemy’s sword. To take up this cross is no easy task. George Fox, speaking once of the persecution to which he was subjected, said that “ he looked at it *in the love of God.*” Happy man, to be able thus “ to kiss the cross ” ! Can we face the world’s spite and enmity with the same great moral triumph, the same perfect peace of soul ?

The world crucifies us, however, in yet another way. *By the sins of others* the cross may enter our life. Many a soul is bearing a cross which is the plain product of the folly or sin of other people. Consider the crucifixions of heredity ! Lives hung upon crosses of disease, fruit of ancestral sin, enduring unspeakable torture, the redemptive nature of which is seldom realised and understood. No sudden crucifixion is this ; often-times but a cross to be taken up indeed

“ daily,” and borne through weary months and years, and frequently it is, physically, a steadily losing battle.

Think of the crucifixion of bereavement and mutilation caused in the recent war ! A number of highly placed men decide upon strife, and the multitudes of the nations rush to destroy each other. The innumerable pathetic crosses that mark the numberless graves of the dead have each a counterpart in the broken hearts of those that still live. As they stare with dulled, grief-laden eyes at the cross that has been thrust with such hideous wantonness into their experience, they know, and we know, that this cross is the hardest for any of us to learn “ to kiss.”

Yet, unless this too can be done, what an arid desert of despair confronts the soul ? Shall the cross be the end of our hope and the destruction of all our delight ? Here the cross of Jesus challenges us indeed. If that tragedy could turn into triumph, and that gloom into glory, shall our cross utterly overcome us ? What can bitterness and hot rebellion do for us ? Can they relieve us of one pang of our crucifixion ? Do they not simply make tragedy more tragic, grief more

grievous, despair more hopeless still ? There is no way out for the soul by these things. *The hardened heart breaks most terribly of all at last.* Only by bravely lifting even this cross, only by pressing it with heroic welcome to one's lips, can peace come and, with peace, power to live again and to win "the far-off interest of tears." Such a supreme act of faith would be indeed the salvation of one's soul—to take the bitterest and most terrible grief of one's whole experience and assert over it a whole-hearted belief in the love of God and the reality of His Providence ! To "kiss the cross" for His sake and in perfect trust in His good working ! This is the supreme victory in life, the ultimate and all-sufficing faith that saves.

Surely no other belief is possible ! If this cross has been thrust upon you as the work of wicked men, nevertheless, the *Divine Hand was not interposed to prevent it.* This means, as surely as night follows day, that the Divine Providence has chosen you for His suffering servant as surely as ever Jesus was chosen. Will you suffer less worthily ? Or will you let Jesus save you in this also, by responding trustingly to His glorious

challenge ? " If a man come after Me, let him take up his cross."

The Gain of Loss

For it is possible to kiss the Cross. It is no counsel of perfection that the Christian faith offers to the grief-stricken soul. It is an achievement that has been accomplished by hundreds of thousands of souls who have " followed " Jesus Christ.

Christ's acceptance of the cross was wonderfully complete. Study the record and see. It is after a hymn of thanksgiving that Jesus goes forth to His betrayal ! Mark how careful He is in the Garden not to get lost in the shadows. " I am He," says Jesus to the soldiery. " Weep not for me, but for yourselves," He cries to the women of Jerusalem, appreciating their pity even while disdaining it. The crowning fact of all is His refusal of the cup of drugged wine, offered Him as an anaesthetic against the pain of the cross. No dimmed sensibility should be His ; the cup of woe should be drained to its dregs, no drop of it foregone. He aspired to " taste death for every man."

Can we not follow Him and accept our

cross ? Think of those who have done so ! St. Paul pleading three times for release from his “ thorn in the flesh,” how bravely he sets himself to the bearing of his cross ! “ God forbid,” he prays, “ God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The cross of his Lord so absorbs his own that it is as though he had none. “ We glory in tribulation,” he says elsewhere. The “ noble army of martyrs ” bears eloquent testimony to his truthfulness.

Is it possible for us to follow St. Paul and his martyr-comrades past the point of resignation to the height of “ glorying ” in the cross ?

It would be easier to answer “ Yes ” if we could find adequate reason for so doing. *They had reason.* There dwelt ever before their eyes a fact of history in which they read a prophecy of their own destiny. The cross of Jesus had been followed by Easter glory, and consummated with the fact of resurrection. Henceforth for them a cross was never simply a tragedy ; always they looked for the sequel of triumph, always it became to them a means to the ultimate good, and ever amid their sacrifices there gleamed the vision of the glory that should be.

If we will accept their faith we can achieve their victory. Ah ! to have one's soul at rest again ! To give in to God ! To surrender the soreness of spirit, the bitterness of disappointment, for the sweetness of trust in Him !

To believe that the "memories that burn" may also bless ! "To strive at last to learn to kiss the cross !" This is to put God's love to the supreme trial, and to find it immediately vindicated. By trust, and by trust alone, the trust of a little child in a Mighty Father, based on the fact of Jesus crucified but risen, can joy begin again in the crucified heart. Let your trust express itself in this great symbolic act. Take your heaviest sorrow, your bitterest grief, your hardest duty, and, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, kiss your cross.

All through life—I see a cross
When sons of God yield up their breath ;
There is no gain except by loss ;
There is no life except by death.

But *there is gain* by loss ; *there is life* by death.

PART II

COMFORT

I

DOES GOD REALLY CARE ?

“ The loving worm within its clod
Were diviner than a loveless God.”

ROUND about our human society, however well organised it may be, there lies on every side a great silent abyss of mystery. From the great dark we each one came. Into the great dark we each one go. However strong may be our inclination to concentrate upon the patch of common daylight in between, the time comes at last for every one of us to lift his eyes to this All-surrounding mystery and to ask, Is it friendly or hostile ? The time in life when one is most sure to ask that question, is when one comes really to love a fellow-being—mother, wife, sweetheart, child, friend. Especially must those souls be haunted by it who have watched their best beloved disappear into the Great Silence.

The loves of our life—and the war has taught us how much they mean to us—must be continually shadowed by dissatisfaction, and bereft of peace, so long as we remain in doubt as to whether what we may call the Over-Life respects our values or rejects them.

Nor will it ever be possible to summon the full and unimpaired strength of the human soul to the “struggle for others” so long as it is felt that nothing more is to be gained than a mere transient worldly prosperity. Man knows himself capable of an undying love, and therefore he can never rest satisfied to build only the sand-castles of mortal ambition.

What matters it for us to solve every problem, to achieve universal earthly well-being, if we cannot feel sure that the universe sets permanent value upon the beings we love and prizes Man above all his achievements ?

The recent War with its terrible death-roll has raised this issue very acutely for many souls. After all love is the very “stuff” of which life is made.

The night has a thousand eyes
The day has but one ;
And the light of a whole world dies
When the sun is gone.

The Mind has a thousand eyes
The heart has but one;
And the light of a whole life dies
When love is done.

So the greatest question of all presses upon our hearts. Does God *really* care ? Is man, as William Watson has put it, "captive or guest of the Universe" ? Is love ever done ? Does the all-surrounding mystery hide eternal life or eternal oblivion for the soul ? Human life hesitates, maimed, blind, insecure, nervous, fearful, till it can believe,

So the all-great were the all-loving too,
So thro' the thunder comes a human voice
Saying—O heart I made, a heart beats here !

It is the aim of this article, written in deepest sympathy with all who have suffered, and by one who also has known bereavement and trouble, to point out as simply as possible a method of intellectual conviction, and a way of personal experience—of God's caring.

Intellectual Conviction

There is a simple method of judgment on this matter which has the merit of being based upon human experience—namely, the

method of judging the Unseen by the Seen. Let us ask what has come forth from the Great Abyss that surrounds human life. The answer is simply creation with its two great parts—Nature and Humanity. Then let God be judged by these. For the writer of Job enunciated a sound criterion of judgment when he made Eliphaz cry, “Is man more pure than his Maker ?” Now it is true that these contain much that seems to our minds ugly, dreadful, incomplete, and calamitous. In Nature there are vipers as well as violets, tigers as well as tulips, earthquakes as well as landscapes.

Nevertheless, Nature is supremely beautiful. She is, in the main, lovely and delightful. There are flowers, and running brooks, and sunshine, and leafy trees, and birds, and butterflies, and waving cornfields. This has to be explained. *It is easier and more rational to believe that they spring from beauty and beneficence in the Creator than that an evil God could produce results so contrary to His nature.* It becomes all the easier when one realises that wherever mankind organises its life with faith and goodwill, the wild and ugly elements in Nature recede and disappear before

him. Even the usual lines of earthquake are traced by science, and no people need build or dwell upon those lines.

Similarly as regards Humanity. Its record is a blood-stained one. Incredible suffering has marked the upward movement of the race.

Yet the supreme fact, after all, is not humanity's suffering *but its survival*. Hope has ever sprung eternal within its breast, and always its deathless faith has met with rich reward. Man has

Set his lordship firm
On earth and fire and sea and air !

And side by side with man's incredible suffering and superior to it—or he could not have survived—has been Exquisite Joy. Great is the sheer delight of living ! Few are the human faces that cannot smile. Mary Cholmondeley's great saying has perfect truth : “Sorrow mines the heart with his pick to make larger chambers for joy to dwell in.” It takes time to find that out often, but it is true. *It is easier and more rational to believe that a good God breathed such joy into life than that an evil God could ever have reason or wish for doing so.* It becomes all the easier when

one realises how swiftly joy returns and is deepened and strengthened in the soul which yields itself up to such a faith.

It is true, of course, that in the humanity which has come from the unseen there have been Neros and Napoleons, cowards and traitors, tyrants and murderers. But there have been also patriots and saints and heroes, and the vast host of obscure humankind have been in the main honest and good living. The race could not have survived else.

It is easier and more rational to believe that in evil men God's character has been denied by their own free choice, than that an evil God could or would ever originate good men.

This point is of first importance. We can see that for a good God to make good men requires free-will for man, and therefore the risk of wrong choice on his part. For no man is good if he is forced to be so. Virtue demands freedom. But for an evil God desiring to make evil men, there would be no value in free-will ; Freedom would mean nothing but obstruction for such a purpose. For obviously man would be a meaner and more abject creature without free-will than with it. The very existence, therefore, of

that deep consciousness of ours, that we are free, and can say "No" as well as "Yes" to God, should convince us that God is good—*only a good God would respect our freedom.*

But here we come to the supreme fact. If we are to judge the unseen by the seen, then let us find the greatest seen. Who is it that leads humanity in nobility of character, wisdom of mind, and sinlessness of life? There can be but one answer, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the supreme phenomenon this earth can show in all its history. It is supremely by Him, then, that we must judge our unseen Creator. Here is the fulness of God's thought and purpose regarding His human children. What then does Jesus reveal?

The Teaching of Jesus

It can be summed up in one of His own great thrilling words, "The Father Himself loveth you!" Mark His teaching. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one falleth to the ground without your Father. Are ye not much better than they?" "The hairs of your head are all numbered."

“ If ye . . . give good gifts to your children . . . how much more shall your Heavenly Father give . . . to them that ask Him ? ”

God’s tender knowledge of our human need is put forward by Jesus as something that should banish all our care, “ For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

It is the Father’s quick passionate interest in the publican and the sinner, the outcast and the prodigal, that Jesus urges in explanation of His own determined seeking of their company. “ Verily, I say unto you there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth ! ”

Jesus always traces His own unique love for men back to the Father. “ The works that I do, I do not of myself, the Father dwelling in me, He doeth the works.” “ He that hath seen me—*hath seen the Father.* ” If, then, we rejoice in Jesus as the Flower of our humanity (blessing little children, eating with sinners, rebuking Pharisees, healing the sick, restoring the blind and the dead, forgiving sins), let us remember that He traces the origin of His own character of love across the

border of our human world to the God Who really cares. We should not have had Jesus but for the Father.

Here, then, is reasonable and secure anchorage for the storm-tossed soul, in the incontestable historical fact of the love of Jesus. It is possible to doubt the love of the unseen God. But no one can doubt the love of Jesus. It is possible to find disappointing limits of character in most human loves, but it is impossible to find fault with the love of Jesus. It is the most wonderful and perfect thing in history.

It is unique in its range. It is utterly universal, without the least suspicion of respect for persons, or of that chronic selectiveness with which prejudice poisons our common human society. It reaches to all nations and classes. "I—if I be lifted up from the earth —will draw all men unto Myself."

The Love of Jesus is unique in its quality. He never compromised His ideal even for love's sake. Ever His love is spotlessly holy and demands a like holiness in those He loves.

It is unique in its sacrifice. Jesus deliberately offered His body to be broken and His blood to be shed for all souls—friends and

enemies, known and unknown, living and yet to be born—alike. In a spiritual agony unparalleled He made the shame of *all sinners* His very own.

“Herein is love.” Real love—love in dazzling perfection.

And this Supreme Lover of men builds His Temple of Love—His mighty refuge for broken lives and tortured souls—on the one foundation fact that God really cares—saying with perfect certitude and simplicity, “The Father Himself loveth you,” “The Father sent Me.”

And then, as though to make His message of Love doubly sure He taught His disciples that He—whom they knew so well and Whose Love they could never doubt—had henceforth all authority in heaven and earth. *Jesus claims to be All-Dominant in the Unseen as well as in the Seen. He rules the Great Abyss.*

Now who will dare to say that Jesus built His ministry upon a lie or a delusion ? Who will accuse the supreme Intellect of our race of a most pathetic and abject error ? Is it possible to believe Jesus wrong ?

But if we cannot believe Him wrong, why not believe Him right ? Really believe Him.

So many people halt between two opinions ! They stand irresolute between reluctance to disbelieve and failure to trust Him wholly. Then they complain that in experiences of trial they have no overpowering conviction.

Let us then consider whether this intellectual conviction cannot be transmuted, deepened, into personal experience.

Feeling God's Caress

How does a little child know whether its parents really care for him ? Can it be simply by judging their actions ? Hardly, for often they must, for his good, cross his will and pleasure. How perplexingly hard many of their wise laws are to him from time to time, especially if chastisement comes into the day's programme. Yet one institution of the home will doubtless assure his little heart of mother's and father's love—*the blessed institution of the caress*. It is the kiss, the straining of the little one to the breast, father's arm about his shoulder, mother's hand upon his head. How precious are these sure tokens that, whatever the mystery of deeds, love is guiding and controlling all.

Similarly in this Universe our Home—the Father's House of Many Rooms—*we can know by God's caress upon our spirit.*

Speak to Him thou, for He hears,
And spirit with spirit can meet.
Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands or feet.

Let the doubting soul seek some quiet hour away from the noise and pressure of the world. *There, accepting Jesus as the truth about God, and permitting his mind to dwell upon that truth, let him surrender himself to simple abandoned trust in the tender love of God.* Let him think of it till the tears of infinite relief begin to flow as the burden rolls away from the heart. Let him bask in the sunshine of God's love *till he finds his soul pierced by a sweet translucent ray of convicting light.* He will receive thus, warm and close upon his soul, his Father's caress. He will *know* that God does really care.

So many souls, unhappily, ignore the possibility of such an experience as this. They take their doubt and difficulty to every one but God. They make no serious personal trial of His existence, His response, His love. They take as the deciding factor in this all-

important question only one side of their experience—the outer side of events. They ask, What has God done, or permitted? They should rather ask, What is the testimony of my inner experience? What is God in and for my soul? If "God is a Spirit" is it not soul-wards that I must seek for Him?

Who does not know the difference made in any time of trouble by a real personal friend, who by his perfect understanding, affection, and trust, even if he can do little or nothing of a practical nature for our relief, nevertheless braces our souls with invincible courage and dauntless hope. Such a friend by the simple reality of his love does for us *the fundamental thing*. In just the same way our first aim regarding God is not to discover whether He will further our petty plans, and assure us unlimited comfort and prosperity. These are secondary, and may be very selfish considerations. It should be rather to know Him personally, and to feel His caring upon our own soul. This will happen if we greet Him with faith. Do we not know how much more we ourselves can be, and do, for those who meet us with open hearts and generous trust? So let us give to God patiently and

humbly the opportunity of making His own impression directly upon our waiting hearts.

Take Thou the hands of prayer we raise
And let us *feel the light of Thee.*

In Charles Haddon Spurgeon's autobiography, the great preacher tells us that as a youth he was terribly afraid of storms. But after he came to Christ he lost all his nervous fears. He says, "I had really trusted myself to Christ, and *I did not dare to fear.*"

"I did not dare to fear." Can we say that? It is the measure of our acceptance of Christ—of our faith in Him and Father Whom He revealed. We either yield Him the domination of our minds and hearts or we do not. Which is it? Our fear hurts and insults the love divine. When once we really believe Jesus—we shall not dare to fear. One perfect fear will then cast all others out—the fear of wounding Him Who cares most of all.

II

“LOVE IS GOD”

WE are all of us familiar with the supreme text of St. John's writings, “God is love,” but I doubt if we are all aware of the original and arresting truth he is trying to make clear in that particular passage of his Epistle. He is urging the life of love upon the Christian disciple, and his crowning argument is in the text, “God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.” He that would live with God must live in love, for God is love, or in other words *love is God*.

Have you ever tried the effect and worked out the significance of reading these familiar words in their reversed order? God is love and love is God. To be sure this is the Apostle's meaning, look for a moment at other verses. “Every one that loveth is begotten of God” says John, love is therefore the very

life of God in the soul. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God." The lack of love is the lack of God. Again he says, "If we love one another, God abideth in us." Love's indwelling is God's indwelling. It is quite clear that the writer means his great text to be reversible, "Love is God."

Love Divine

Of course, by love, the writer means real love—the genuine thing. He does not mean the frivolous selfish passion which all too often passes muster for love in human experience. Shakespeare knew how easily love may be simulated when he wrote,

Love is not love which alters
When it alteration finds.

The fickle affection which is simply a subtle self-pleasing, the exploitation of another for one's own vanity and delight, is not love. The great test of genuineness in love is unselfishness. "Love seeketh not her own," says Paul, and his majestic hymn sings the Love Divine to which John refers.

It is love of the order of Calvary, as John reminds us. "Herein is love, that He sent

His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Wherever love is pure and perfected in unselfishness there is God, says the Apostle. And we may confirm his statement by an appeal to our own experience.

(a) *The emotion of love in its analysis suggests a Divine Presence.*

Tennyson speaks of love as "the likest God within the soul," and the soul that has known love has felt for itself *the awe of its divinity*. I care not what the relationship be, in which love arises, whether between friend and friend, sweetheart and lover, wife and husband, parent and child, brother and sister, love yields immediately a sense of divine overshadowing—an awe of the very presence of God. It is, however, in the relation of parent and child that this experience reaches its climax.

Every true father and mother knows how the inscrutable mystery of life envelops one's soul as one looks upon the little life entrusted to one's care. The sense of God in the soul has been quickened as often by the baby's cradle as by public worship. Jesus was right when He domesticated religion, and took as the supreme symbol of the

relation of God and man, fatherhood and sonship.

Love a Thing of God

It is quite a new "H. G. Wells" that we have in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*. Fancy the arch-intellectualist of our generation, the cold dissector of our noblest emotions, turning religious and feeling out after God ! His testimony is eloquent on this very matter. Mr. Britling, you will remember, is conversing with the American bachelor, Mr. Direck, and says to him, "Ah, your troubles in life haven't begun yet. *Wait till you're a father.* That cuts to the bone. You have the most delicate thing in the world in hand—a young kindred mind, and *you lose touch with it.* When things go well I know of them, when the world goes dark for him, then he keeps his troubles from me just when I would so eagerly go into it with him. You don't really know what love is until you have children. The love of children is an exquisite tenderness—*it rends the heart—it is a thing of God.* I lie awake at nights and stretch out my hands in the darkness to this lad—who will never know until his sons come in their time."

H. G. Wells is right. Love is “a thing of God.” Love is God.

What else did Jesus mean when He said, “Whoso receiveth a little child in My name receiveth Me.”

Love a Creative Energy

(b) *There is in love a creative energy which accords with this meaning of our text.*

I am not thinking here of the simple and eloquent fact that most of the homes of civilisation are created by love, and would not have come into being without it, but rather of the way in which love brings into being the dormant powers and possibilities of the individual life. A great love will transform character, and apparently actually create talent. It will release unsuspected energies in the soul. Have we not seen the lazy man made industrious, the thriftless provident, the foolish wise, the rash careful, under the inspiration of love? Consider this description, given by Emerson, of the man in love, and notice how inevitably at last it falls into the language that we associate with the regenerating power of the Christian faith.

“Behold there in the woods the fine

madman. He is a palace of sweet sounds and sights ; he dilates, he is twice a man ; he walks with arms akimbo ; he soliloquises ; he accosts the grass and the trees, he feels the blood of the violet, the clover, the lilies, in his veins, and he talks with the brook that wets his feet. The heats of love that have opened his perceptions of natural beauty have made him love music and verse. The like force has passion all over his nature. It expands the sentiment, it makes the clown gentle, and gives the coward heart. *Into the most pitiful and abject it will infuse a heart and courage to defy the world.* In giving him to another, love still more gives him to himself. *He is a new man, with new perceptions, new and keener purposes, and a religious solemnity of character and aims. He is somewhat, he is a person, he is a soul."*

Such is the creative energy of love. It suggests the presence of that One Who brooded over primeval chaos and said, "Let there be light," "Let us make man." In the presence of love we come into contact with something elemental, upon which all other things rest and are built up. It is impossible not to feel that love is life, and the deepest

life of all. It is impossible for long to speak of it as something. *It is Some One.* A Living Being, breathing the passion of His Spirit into us, and making us living souls indeed.

Truth is just God thinking

It is worth while reminding ourselves that the virtues, such as love, truth, etc., have no independent existence of their own. In these days of ethical societies we are often urged just to live for virtue, and the insistence of more orthodox Christianity on personality is frequently ridiculed. But what is virtue? Did you ever see a lump of love, unless it was a cuddlesome little living child? Love is no *thing*. It is the beat of God's heart—the embrace of His everlasting arms. It is warm and radiant with strong pulsating life. Truth is not a *thing*. It is just God thinking. We enter into Truth when we commune with His mind, and think His thought after Him. Did not Jesus say, “*I am the Truth*”?

So, look not coldly on love as a thing apart, think not of it as a merely human affair. “He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, for God is Love.”

If we feel this is true, then :

Love will be Sanctified

If love is God, there should be an end to all irreverent treatment of love in every relationship. Marriage should cease to be a universal joke. Not that there may not be matter enough for pure humour. There was much humour in Jesus, and we may be sure there is much in God. Love's face is always smiling, even through its tears.

It has been suggested that our common jocularity upon courtship and marriage is simply a veil used to hide the passionate depths and tides of our real feeling. There may be something in that explanation, but the mind that views love as divine will be consistently reverent in spirit towards this noblest emotion of the soul. There can be for such no light and frivolous trifling with the affections of another. There will be no merely civil marriages — God's house, the home of public worship, will be the only fitting place for the vows of wedlock to be uttered and hallowed.

The life of the home also will be filled with a Sacred Presence, the Mediator between

soul and soul, the Living Spirit of holy, divine love. Our relations with one another will never be matters merely of our own concern, they will always include God in their reference.

How much such a realisation of this truth might do for the homes of the world ! It would assure to each one of them an altar of worship. It would fill every heart with a fierce hatred of all that degrades and cheapens love.

Nothing else Matters

We have all enjoyed a more immediate experience of God than we have realised.

What a striking contrast is presented to us in Paul's speech on Mars Hill. There is the altar on the Athenian highway to an “Unknown God.” The multitudes hurry past it, thinking as they pass that this God is far from them—an utter stranger.

But what does Paul tell them ? “ He is not far from any one of you.” “ In Him we live and move and have our being.” Every one of those crowds had loved, and in loving they had known something of God without recognising Him. God can be so near us that

we overlook Him. As Francis Thompson asks :

Does the fish soar to find the ocean ?
Or the eagle plunge to find the air ?

Have you recognised God's close presence with you ? Yield your life up to love—love of the order of Calvary, and you will find a deepening conviction settling upon your soul that God is with you.

It is just in this way that Christ brings us to God. He brings us to love, utterly pure, utterly perfect. That life of perfect service, that death of vicarious sacrifice, that spirit of redeeming passion, capture us entirely for love, divine and holy, and so Christ dying, "the just for the unjust," brings us to God, and no man comes unto the Father but by Him.

This is all borne out by the context of this verse, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God," so that to dwell in love is to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. In other words, the acknowledgment of Christ as Saviour and Lord is perfected only in a life of love. Did not Jesus say, "If you love Me, keep My

commandments”? No wonder John, in his old age, almost wearied the disciples who listened to him by his constant reiteration of one plea, “Little children love one another, for love is of God.” When they protested at the monotony of his utterance he assured them that “nothing else matters, save love.”

The Royal Road to Comfort

But what infinite comfort there is in this truth.

We are in touch with *God*! He is inspiring all that is most beautiful in our life. Serving love, we enjoy His Presence with ever-increasing rapture. Herein is the royal road to comfort for every sorrowing heart and stricken soul. Launch away from self upon the ocean of loving service of others, and you will find Him Who is the Comforter.

Do you remember that the Lord was known to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus “in the breaking of bread”? It is in the “breaking of life” for the need of the world that Christ is best discovered. Christ is the supreme presence on the way of the Cross.

The story of Josephine Butler is eloquent

with this truth. She and her husband returned home after a holiday, eager to meet their one little child. The child was upstairs when they arrived, and was looking over the low balustrading as they entered the hall. In the excitement the child lost its balance and fell into the hall below, and died of its injuries. It seemed as though the light of life had gone out for them.

But the death of that little child came to mean the saving of many another child and woman ; for in her search for comfort Mrs. Butler spent herself in the service of the wayward and unfortunate women and girls of London. And in the service of love she met her Lord, the Comforter Divine.

Lose your sorrow in the sorrows of others—let grief urge you to the relief of others—and in that denial of self you will find yourself in closer contact with Christ, and enjoying a deepened experience of His presence. For “he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God.”

William Blake in his poem, “The Divine Image,” pays a beautiful tribute to this healing, helping, thrilling truth that Love is God.

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
All pray in their distress ;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is God our Father dear ;
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is man His child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man of every clime
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew.
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too.

III

THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE PROTECTION

Jesus, and "Immunity"

THERE is an absoluteness about certain verses of the ninety-first Psalm which must not be taken too literally, or applied too universally. We have to recognise its limitations as a product of Old Testament thought.

"It shall not come nigh thee" is not an invariable truth. The facts of life and of religious experience do not warrant the assertion that the man of faith will never be called upon to suffer calamity. The ninety-first Psalm was written at a time when there was a very widespread opinion in Israel that immunity from suffering was the reward of virtue and of faith. If a man trusted in God he would always have plenty of children, plenty of cattle, and a happy life. So that

the rich were obviously the good people, the poor and unfortunate were evidently sinful.

We may smile at so crude a view, but I am not sure that some rich folk to-day do not try hard to preserve the delusion. It is still a favourite habit of thought to suspect the poor of being peculiarly sinful and deserving of their lot. But the facts of life are against such a doctrine, and one sees the revolt against it springing up in Israel in certain Psalms, like the seventy-third, and in the Book of Job, where the suffering of the righteous is found to be a hard and pressing problem.

We have to admit that men of faith are often overtaken by calamity. Think of General Gordon, that magnificent soldier of Christ—over a long stretch of years he bore a charmed life, and for a long time the ninety-first Psalm was literally fulfilled in his experience ; but had he ceased to trust and serve God when he was shot down in Khartoum ? Surely not. But we need not go far afield for illustrations. Was it not a common saying in the War that the “best” were taken ? What of the brave dear lads we have known—men of shining faith and perfect trust and loyalty to God—who have

succumbed to the perils of the battle-field ? What of those two dear old souls at Stoke Newington who were bombed to death whilst kneeling by their bedside ?

What did Jesus promise His disciples ? Immunity ? "In the world ye shall have tribulation." We need to beware of this doctrine of immunity. It can be wrested to the destruction of the soul, as in the case recorded by Mark Rutherford of the man—a pillar of the Calvinistic church—who was saved from death by lightning whilst out driving, because, as he said, "*Providentially* the lightning struck the box-seat and killed the coachman." For sheer callous selfishness that would be hard to beat.

The Arm of God

But because this is so we must not, as others do, rush to the other extreme and deny divine providence altogether. This is done, of course, by those who do not believe in God at all. But it is also done by a certain type of religious thought, and upon a plea of some nobility.

They assert that God—as H. G. Wells puts it—is not going to play nursery-governess

to men, as though they were a lot of children. He holds them strictly responsible for their actions, and everything they sow they must reap. God is not going to interfere in human affairs or with natural laws for anybody's benefit, and the sooner we realise it the better. We must help ourselves, for God must not help us—it would spoil His purpose.

There is a stern stoic courage about this attitude that is very noble, but we have to ask, Does it square with facts? And here, again, the theory breaks upon the rock of facts—another and opposite set of facts—every whit as numerous and as impressive as the others.

Men are delivered. Escapes are often quite unaccountable, and justly termed miraculous. Religion does confer immunity of a unique kind in hosts of instances. Read the life of Mary Slessor, and see that weak woman moving with perfect safety amid blood-thirsty savages. To stop their mouths and prevent their evil passions was a greater miracle than saving Daniel from the lion's den. Read the testimony of David Livingstone, or H. M. Stanley, who declares that often spears were brandished within a few

inches of his face, yet he felt no fear, confident that God would protect him—and protected he was.

A friend of mine has gathered into a little volume, called *The Arm of God*, a very large number of these records of deliverance, all carefully verified and quite trustworthy.

During an air raid in England an officer of one of the churches, whose way to church lies through a certain road and who always traverses the south side of it at the same hour on a Sunday evening, on one particular Sunday crossed the road under a sudden impulse just before bombs fell on the very spot he would ordinarily have reached, and thus he escaped in safety. Was that mere coincidence? Sir A. Conan Doyle has solemnly assured us that the most expert military opinion can discover no explanation of the victory of the Allies at the Battle of the Marne.

Unrealised Deliverances

But ought we not in this problem to take a larger survey of life than is afforded by isolated incidents either of calamity or deliverance? When we do so we are compelled to

admit that Divine protection is the great *fact* of human life, whereas violent death and disaster are but minor facts, exceptions to a marvellous rule of life preserved.

Take the story of the race, its sufferings have been great, but how much more wonderful its survival and progress? The great marvel of the human story is not that men have been consumed with evil passions of lust and cruelty, but that *they have not* succeeded in behaving like the Kilkenny cats, who fought till only their tails were left. Somehow, there has been a restraining, healing, reconciling, protecting Force at work, Whose laws of operation we may only imperfectly understand, but Whose spirit of goodwill is obvious to all.

But, further, what of the comparative immunity we have individually enjoyed? What of the accidents that have never happened to you and me—the calamities that have never befallen us, the life preserved amid innumerable possibilities of harm? How many million consumption bacilli do you swallow every time you open your mouth? How much bigger a risk you run every time you enter a tram or 'bus in London

than by living in a period of air raids, yet nothing has yet come your way ! Is it mere coincidence, mere blind chance, that you have been preserved ?

If we are going to judge God at all, do let us be fair. If it is a count of instances, who can deny the miracle of His protection ? Shall I set the one day of death and disaster against all the years of uneventful life, the one night of pain against the thousand and one nights of delight and peaceful repose ? If we are to judge God by what happens, then protection is the glaring fact of life and disaster the exception.

There is a good story told of Archbishop Whateley, that he was once in a company of people where one man was boasting of how the Lord had delivered him when the vessel in which he travelled from New York to Liverpool had caught fire. So many had perished, yet he was saved !

When he had finished his story, Whateley turned to him and said, "A wonderful occurrence ! A great and signal mercy, indeed ! But I think I can surpass the wonder of it with an incident from my own experience ! "

Everybody pricked up their ears and listened for the passage in the Archbishop's life more wonderful than this man's escape from the burning ship.

Whateley went on: "Not three months ago I sailed in the packet from Holyhead to Kingston"—a pause while the Archbishop took a copious pinch of snuff, and his hearers were on the tiptoe of expectation—"and by God's mercy *the vessel never caught fire at all!* Think of that, my friends."

Surely Whateley was right.

There is a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we may."

There is a divine protection, sleepless and ever operative, that prolongs to us all over great stretches of time, the great gift of life.

Do you never look at that little boy of yours, the little demon who climbs everywhere, and is for ever taking the most appalling risks, and wonder at his immunity amid all his mad escapades? Are you not reminded of the old picture which shows two children wandering in their play near the edge of a terrible precipice, from which they are protected by an angel-form, invisible to them-

selves, but none the less their guardian in the hour of peril? Why does that picture lay such hold upon our hearts? Is it not because of our conviction that it stands for a great truth "The Lord is mindful of His own"?

God's Individual Care

When, further, we turn from the facts of experience to the probabilities of the situation, we find that the balance of reason is all on the side of believing in the personal protection of God over every life. The teaching of Jesus as to God's care of the individual soul is, upon reflection, seen to be the simplest common sense. Opponents of that teaching, or those faint-hearted in the faith, sometimes pretend that they can believe in God's purpose and design for the race as a whole, but not in His care for the individual.

How they manage such a monstrosity of thought I don't know. Consider what it means. They admit that God has a purpose in the whole of things. They must admit it, we all must, it is simply inconceivable that this vast mechanism and glory of being that we call the universe is without a purpose, grinding out through the ages nothing but

dust, achieving only its own destruction. You cannot believe anything so foolish as that. So, then, they say, you can believe there is a purpose for the whole, but there is no attention to the parts. As Dr. Fosdick reminds us in *The Meaning of Prayer*, it is as though an architect came to you with the plan of a house, very beautiful and captivating, but the moment you ask him about the doors, or the stairs, or a particular room, he says, "Oh ! I've paid no attention to that. I haven't troubled about such details." What would his plan be worth ? God can have no plan for all without a care for each. The doings and the experiences of each living soul in His universe must matter to Him moment by moment. He cannot, and does not, wish to move to His goal over our heads. His way lies through our hearts, and He carries each life with Him into His great scheme.

It is not easy for us to grasp this fact of His personal attention to each separate life ; yet, as a recent writer has pointed out, the greater one's knowledge is, the more is its capacity for dealing with a multitude of detail. It is indeed a characteristic of know-

ledge. For example, you go into a large library, and the books therein are just a vague undifferentiated mass of literature to you, but not so to the librarian whose knowledge is greater ; to him they are not a mass, for he knows every one of them by name, and each has its peculiar character for him. It is his knowledge that makes the difference. You look at a pile of rocks ; that is all they are to you ; not so, however, to the geologist, to whom each part of the different strata stands out distinctly from the mass, bearing its testimony of bygone days. You jump on to a railway engine, it is just a confused mass of machinery to you, but to the engineer with his special knowledge each part stands out clearly with its due purpose fully perceived, and he knows that the tiniest part in disorder may wreck the whole. It is knowledge that yields this power of detail.

So it is with humanity. We, with our limited understanding and undeveloped sympathy, look upon it, and speak of "the masses" ; but God in the perfection of knowledge " calleth His sheep by name," and not even a sparrow falleth to the ground without Him.

God's providence is working on behalf of every living soul. Divine protection is the most reasonable of beliefs.

Exceptions that prove the Rule

What then of the so-called Exceptions?

I say *so-called* for a very good reason. We ought not to expect the providence of God in its individual working to operate uniformly in every life. Individual providence means meeting the actual need of the individual in the very best way for that individual. Knowing, then, how different we are one from another, ought it to surprise us that for some the providence of God means death instead of life, or that for the same individual it means life to-day, and death a few days hence?

So long as we can believe, and this is the essential Christian doctrine of providence, that only the best is allowed in any given situation to happen for the soul, does it matter whether it takes the form of life or of death?

Beyond this obvious truth we may point out other reasons why exceptions might occur to that form of Divine Providence which preserves one in life and health and happiness.

1. *The necessity for respecting human Freedom.* It is a primary necessity of God's moral government of the world to hold men responsible for their decisions, choices, and actions. Men learn the nature of their ideas and choices by the results that accrue to their expression. Therefore a certain amount of freedom, not merely in action, but in the experience of the consequences, would seem to be essential to the race's education in virtue. The terrible degree of human suffering permitted is an indication of the sternness of God's love-purpose, and the intensity of His respect for human responsibility. And in our hearts we know He is right, and would not have it otherwise.

No true man would hesitate a moment if asked to choose between security and freedom. It is in freedom that our real being lies—without it we are puppets and slaves, and the life of the pampered lap-dog, however safe, will never be preferred by man to the life of the free moral being bearing the burden of his own choice.

In our best moments we feel with Longfellow :

Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way,
But to act that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

We have a goal to reach—the goal of a true and perfect choice of the Good and True and Beautiful, and it is better for us to stumble thither with many a fall, than to be forbidden the course.

2. *The need for testing human virtue.* Will men hold to goodness, purity, truth, liberty, humanity, at all costs? Will they *prove* their faith in the divine programme for human life in such a way as to put it beyond all doubt for God and mankind and themselves? That is a question of vital importance which men need answered as well as God. Self-knowledge is an absolute need. Here then is one use that God makes of evil. It is the test of virtue. No test can suffice save the absolute test of death and wounds and agony—the test of repeated Calvaries. Only thus are God's sons and daughters truly manifested to all the world.

Is this a matter for lament and for railing against God? Surely not! Out of their blood springs the seed of a yet diviner

humanity, and all their suffering turns to the praise of God. The witness of their glorious faith kindles anew the divine fire in the hearts of men, and lights the way back to heaven for the furthest wanderer. " For it is given unto us not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

3. *Many of the " exceptions " are unnecessary and untimely.* We must never so interpret the providence of God that it overrides the freedom of men. Men can by their own folly and sin launch themselves out of this life before their time, and apart from the will and call of God. No man's suicide is predestined. You can put your number up as well as God.

God's providence is constantly appealing for our co-operation. God is a Spirit, and He works through our own mind and will, and seeks to guide and control us from the seat and centre of our own being. If we ignore Him and make no room for His Spirit in our heart and life we must necessarily hamper Him in His beneficent designs.

It is true He is indifferent to no life, and He girds every one of us with His power, though we know it not, but such providence

is as nothing to what He might do for us were we but to yield ourselves entirely into His Hand. It may well be that at any given time in our life our continued existence amid the innumerable perils of this earthly experience may depend upon the degree in which our souls are open to divine suggestion and leading.

If we shut our life to Him, if we cherish the selfish spirit, if, for example, we give place and power to the devil of war, we cannot lay our suffering at His door. But if we give our heart to Him, if we yield our energy loyally and in perfect trust to His service, then His Providence must be able to do for us more than we have ever dreamed of.

The soul which so believes carries at its heart a great peace, an unruffled calm, a sense of God stronger than fear, calamity, sin or death, an inward sure deliverance which is the earnest of the final deliverance yet to come, when sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and death shall be no more. “ Fear not, even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

IV

GOD'S HIDDEN FORCES

The Depressed Mood

WE may not be able to identify ourselves very closely with Elijah on Mount Carmel, amid the scenes of his dramatic triumph, but doubtless every one of us can join him in that later position of his, under the juniper tree, in the grip of a morbid fit of depression.

We have all known what it is to be depressed at times, and especially, perhaps, in the recent days of war. In fact, we have developed a slang phrase which is curiously reminiscent of this word of Elijah's, "It is enough," namely, the not very elegant but very expressive phrase, "I am fed up." We know what it is to be replete with adverse fortune, to suffer blow after blow, loss after loss, until we have cried, "Enough, let me die rather than live."

Elijah, however, did not remain in this low condition, and the nineteenth chapter of the first Book of Kings is the story of the cure of his depression. That story may guide us, if we will look at it, to that cheerfulness of heart and buoyancy of mind without which life can never be worthily lived.

We notice in passing that Elijah's despondency was in part due to physical exhaustion. He had achieved a remarkable athletic feat, under the exhilaration of his mountain victory, outrunning the king's chariot over a course of about twenty miles. Spent with so heavy a test of endurance, he is met with the crushing disappointment of Jezebel's hardness of heart, and her determination to slay him.

He takes a further journey, and it is little wonder that in his exhaustion he casts himself on the ground and longs for death. What a practical book the Bible is! The angel's advice to him, "Arise and eat," shows the fullest recognition of the spirit's dependence upon the body. Thus we learn anew that a good square meal may go far to help the soul towards the heights of cheer and faith.

The Church, with a story like this before her, ought never to forget the social and

physical implications of the Gospel. We should learn once and for all that when people's minds are cruelly harassed by the struggle to live at all, it is the height of folly, as well as brutality, to mock their condition with eloquent invitations to high spiritual achievement.

Elijah's depression, however, had a spiritual as well as a physical cause, and it is with that particularly that we have to do.

As I read this chapter it becomes evident that disappointment had clouded Elijah's mind to three great facts. One of the chief perils attaching to the sorrows and disappointments of life, is that they tend to engross the mind, and prevent the adequate realisation of deeper and greater facts. Elijah permitted grief so to engage his mind that he forgot three things :

God's Hidden Forces.

God's Hidden Plans.

God's Hidden Servants.

God's Unseen Forces

Elijah was essentially a man of fire and force. He was a perfect "tornado" of zeal and righteousness. He came and went with

the dramatic suddenness of the "whirlwind," and spoke to king and people with a voice of thunder. He was the "earthquake" in the midst of society, a veritable consuming flame of wrath.

His thought of God was essentially similar —a consuming fire, and like fire always obvious. It was the God Who answered by fire who appealed to Elijah most. No wonder then that when the fire came, and yet the hearts of king and queen remained untouched, his faith broke and his heart failed him. We do not always realise, I fear, that the revolution on Mount Carmel failed. Dramatic as it was, it was too external to the conscience of the people and their sovereigns to have lasting effect. The failure crushed Elijah because he forgot certain things about God. So the Lord graciously drew this stricken soul into the solitude of the desert and mountain, and revealed to him deeper and stronger forces than those that are seen and obvious. The Lord was *not* in the earthquake, nor in the wind, nor in the fire.

"And after the fire *a sound of gentle stillness.*" That is, of course, *no sound at all*. Only a stillness that could be felt, a silence eloquent

with convicting knowledge, a whisper fainter than a zephyr breeze, yet unmistakable—a whisper of God in the soul.

We all know that voiceless Voice, that still sound. Here is a man who has murdered a fellow-being. He escapes, and puts the ocean between himself and justice. The terrors of the law cannot reach him ; earthquake, fire, and wind are impotent. He gloats over his immunity, and then suddenly, and it seems *because* of his immunity, there arises a whisper in his soul, a sound of gentle stillness—but an inexorable sound. He hears it beneath the rush of busy daily thought—it beats in upon him with the pulse of his heart through the sleepless watches of the night ; and he knows that although he has escaped justices he cannot escape Justice, and at last, to gain rest and peace, he crosses the ocean again and surrenders to the penalty of his crime.

Ah ! God has a long arm ; He has His own laws of extradition. He has unseen forces more potent than the obvious pomp and panoply of power with which men love to clothe the law. Conscience is the greatest of all God's unseen forces, for it springs from the fundamental fact that all living creatures

are in contact somewhere with God. "In Him we live and move and have our being." Otherwise we simply could not exist. We breathe by Him moment by moment, and where He is His Spirit can speak and work. The still small voice can be stifled and ignored, but it has infinite resurrections and an exhaustless life, and will say all it desires at last.

Elijah had been so engrossed with God's obvious working that he had forgotten His unseen operations.

What is the extent of our belief in unseen forces? Surely it is the "unseen" that influences us most. See, here is a man! What is it we see? Just a moulded lump of clay? Is that the supreme wonder? Is it that we seek in approaching him? What interest is there in a corpse? No, it is the soul we want, the heart that beats with love, the mind whose thought runs clear, the will which moves so imperiously eye and hand and foot. Without this unseen being, what force is there in a man?

I think of good John Brown, who started the struggle for negro liberty. Moved by an irresistible passion for liberty, he struck his

blow for the “ poor black trash.” They condemned him to the scaffold ; and as he went forth to die doubtless many thought that here was the end of the struggle for freedom, and here was the triumph of slavery. It was all so obvious that John Brown was coming to his end. On the way he stooped and kissed a little black baby, and then died. The “ seen ” part of him disappeared, but ere very long the mighty armed host of the Northern armies were marching to victory singing

John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But *his soul* goes marching on.

That triumph was possible because, slumbering deep in the hearts of men, there is a great passion for liberty, fed from the river of God’s own freedom, and the “ unseen ” in one calls irresistibly at last to the “ unseen ” in others.

One of our greatest perils during these recent years has been the way in which our trust has been drawn out to “ seen ” forces and material contrivances. The sword is new to our hand, and its glitter may all too easily dazzle our vision. We may become like the child with his new toy-weapon, who

thinks it can achieve everything, and stabs the wall and calls it "killed!"

It does not need a great insight to see that there is a decided limit to what the sword can accomplish for liberty and justice and human brotherhood. Everything depends at last upon the trust we have exercised in, and the use we have made of, God's hidden forces.

What, for example, is our belief in prayer? If it is possible to reach another life, not merely through hand and eye and spoken word, but from soul to soul by way of God, what influence we may be squandering and neglecting in forgetting to pray! Have you ever noticed how angry sometimes a person will get who is told that others are praying for his conversion? What is the explanation of that anger? It is the instinct of danger—the conviction that there is a deeper way into every soul than the seen and outward way—the feeling that prayer undermines all the obstacles between soul and soul, and opens up a lightning way of the spirit.

And is it not simply true that beneath our isolated lives is the great Common life of God, and that as the islands of the sea in the deeps of the water are one land, so we individuals

in the deeps of being are one Spirit, " for in Him we live and move and have our being " ?

If you would find cheer of soul, look for the " unseen " forces. Many people said during the War, Where is God ? They wanted to see Him in earthquake and fire, and in the obvious forces of nature, and seemed able to find Him only *in the weather*. But, alas, the forces of Nature seem so impartial morally ; they kill the good and leave the evil alive. They carry no sure sign that they are of God at all. But Jesus said, " God is a Spirit. "

It is, then, for spiritual forces we must enquire, and they abound on every hand. What is the explanation of the amazing courage and invincible cheerfulness of the manhood of our time ? How are we to account for the new passion for liberty which brought five million volunteers to the standard of freedom and justice ? What of the elaborate sacrifices made on behalf of the wounded, the exaltation of the Red Cross ? The ugly, sordid story of this great struggle is shot through and through with the sunshine of God's Presence—the gold of His Spirit showing up against the dross of human greed and wrong.

The unseen forces of courage and hope, and faith and love and conscience, are working powerfully, and will at last beat the swords into ploughshares and silence the guns for ever. And where these powers abound God cannot be absent.

Believe, then, that these unseen forces are available for the solution of your problems, and you cannot despair. Listen for the still small voice speaking beneath the din of the world's life, and the noise of tumbling fortunes and thrones. "For our light affliction . . . worketh for us . . . an eternal weight of glory, *so long as we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.*" "The soul opens inwardly *upon God.*"

God's Hidden Plans

The next thing God calls to Elijah's mind is the fact that Elijah is not the only one who has been giving his thought to Israel's plight. Elijah is to anoint this man and that, and "evil shall slay the wicked," and a new prophet shall arise. The Lord has been thinking and planning as well as Elijah. God has a plan, and a workable one.

There are quaint touches of egotism about

Elijah's attitude in this chapter. How liable we all are to think ourselves God's forlorn hope and only resource. The Kingdom will fail, we think, if our plans are frustrated. Elijah had planned, and his scheme had met a disastrous end, and, to put it colloquially, he was "stumped." He could think of nothing else ; and when he was at his wits' end, then graciously and tenderly God unfolded *His* plan for the situation.

It is not difficult to see that no better cure for egotism exists than this. God never gets so full an opportunity of possessing us utterly for His own plans, than when we have exhausted our own ingenuity. But it is everything to realise that *God has His plans*. When I am baffled by any given situation, or cast down by the apparent failure of God's work, then it means everything to me to realise that back of all my failure, back of all the complexity and perplexity of circumstances, is God, exerting the energy of Omniscient mind upon my problems.

We are the victims of a very false view of God if we think of Him as merely the Celestial Spectator, looking on and simply awarding praise or blame. That is not Christ's view

of God, nor the one given here. Listen to what Jesus says: "My Father *toileth* hitherto, and I *toil*." You are not alone in your struggle, Christian worker! The greatest of all Allies is yours. *God* is thinking, planning about your life, your work for Him and His Kingdom. Get that fact well established in your mind, and a surging hope and pride will fill it, flooding out all depression.

God has His plan. That is certain. But whether we are in line with it, that is uncertain.

His plans are not to be understood by everybody. It takes humble and patient waiting upon Him to discover them. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." You must be unreservedly His friend to have His confidence. You must cultivate the habit of never planning your life or work without reference to Him. Fancy trying to bring in *His* Kingdom without consulting *His* plans.

But again, the thrilling glory of this idea! If one could but glimpse the Eternal Mind and see His plan! How infinitely beautiful and wise and good it must be, and how irresistibly attractive!

Do you believe in that plan ? Are you opening your mind to it ? God's energy is ceaselessly outpoured for the bringing of His Kingdom. There is no fault with Him. Failure can only be due to our being out of line with Him, and our insistence upon working only from the shallow resources of our own intelligence. God has hidden plans for the terrible situation Europe finds herself in to-day. If only statesmen and churchmen, the people and their leaders everywhere, would really seek unto Him, nothing could keep back the illumination of His Spirit.

“ Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He shall direct thy paths.”

God's Hidden Servants

Elijah thought himself alone in Israel in his faithful adherence to Jehovah. God shows him a secret host of seven thousand who had not surrendered hearts or knees to Baal. It is ever so. God's servants are a mightier host than is ever visible. Goodness may be denied the throne in many a soul, but it is never entirely crushed out of existence. Vice is ever rendering homage to virtue in its very practice of passing itself off for goodness.

Let us develop an eye for goodness in unfamiliar circumstances and in strange people. Francesca Alexander has a beautiful poem upon this subject, "The Hidden Servants of God," in which she tells the story of a hermit who through forty years waited upon God in prayer and meditation, and then asked to be shown a fellow-man whose piety was just equal, no more, no less, to his own, that he might judge what progress he had made in the life divine. He is directed by the Lord to the market square of the neighbouring town, and to a mountebank amusing the crowd with grotesque antics. The hermit can hardly believe that this man's piety is equal to his own, and waits till the crowd is gone to interrogate him. He fully expects that the poor mummer has been a hermit at some time in his life, but no. "Before I was a mountebank," the man says, "I was a robber!" And he goes on to tell how he rescued from the robber band an innocent girl who fell into their clutches, and restored her to her home without reward, save for her simple "God bless you," which had remained with him ever since, a constant benediction.

The old hermit learns that there are many ways to God other than his way, and many hidden servants not to be judged by outward appearances. He remembers that in the last day, "many that are first shall be last, many that are last shall be first."

O champion of God, tempted to despair, lift up your heart ! God has a greater grip upon humanity than you realise. Let the Church face the non-worshipping masses in the strength of this conviction, that in their hearts, secretly and acknowledged, is the great Divine Ally, and the Church will not speak in vain. In every human soul there is the hidden servant, the secret conviction only imperfectly confessed and witnessed to before men.

Let us bring the "hidden servants" to the light. I have often wondered what would have happened in Israel if Elijah had discovered these seven thousand earlier. He might have swept the whole nation into a purer way of life. Let us face the world, striking through its superficial self to the great hidden force of Conscience wherein God and the soul meet, appealing to the best, the unseen best in every soul.

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore.

Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.

But there must be "the loving hand," "the kindness." There must be in the prophets of God that quick faith in the Unseen which will kindle the faith of others.

When we believe in conscience, and trust the working of the Unseen Spirit of God, and boldly challenge the secret conviction and knowledge of the world, "then deep shall call unto deep," and out of the united depths shall arise "the perfect Son of God"—Humanity made One and Whole in Christ our Lord.

V

THE JUSTICE OF LIFE

THE justice men demand of God is not exhausted in the adequate punishment of the sinful. There is a further demand, namely, that the wrong done by the sinner shall be righted, that the injury and loss caused by sin to the innocent and the sinned-against shall be made up and healed. For although it is true that no one suffers eventually so badly as the sinner by his sin, yet others do suffer often very grievously and cruelly.

What provision is there in God's government of the world for the soul that is sinned against? For the innocent who are the scapegoats of the guilty; for the weak who are the prey of the strong; for the simple, honest souls who are defrauded by the guile and craft of the unscrupulous?

Take as an illustration. A youth of weak will and bad training brought under the influence of a bright, gifted, strong-willed scoundrel, and led away to evil courses until, with resources squandered and health shattered, he is flung on Society's scrap-heap.

It is not enough for the more responsible sinner to be duly punished ; more urgent still is the question as to how the wasted life and ruined soul of that lad are to be reclaimed and restored.

Or, in further illustration, think of the cruel disadvantages that are the lot of the child born in the overcrowded conditions of a London slum—or, on the other hand, born into a family of wealth, where luxury and indulgence, hand in hand with indifference to the higher interests, spell ruin just as surely for many a child.

Beyond these instances, may it not be asked whether justice is ever done to any soul in this earthly life ?

Is there a soul without some disabilities of heredity or circumstance ? In so far as man is collectively still woefully deficient in knowledge, how is it possible for any soul to have those ideal circumstances which would

satisfy its fullest capacity, and call forth its fullest development ?

One of the saddest features of human life is its obvious incompleteness everywhere. We are all of us conscious of capacities that lack of opportunity forbids us to satisfy.

Dr. McTaggart in one of his books points out that many of the best things in life are either incompatible or the opportunities of pursuing them become mutually exclusive.

He says, “ We cannot spend our youth both in the study and in the saddle ; we cannot gain the benefit both of unbroken health and bodily weakness, both of riches and poverty, both of defiance and obedience. We cannot learn the lessons alike of Galahad and of Tristram and of Caradoc. And yet they are all so good to learn ! ”

These days are frequently called the days of specialisation, but there is a pathos as well as a glory about the specialist. He is often lop-sided, with a great bump for one subject of knowledge and a hopeless ignorance of other things. Yet other fields of enquiry are just as fascinating and as good as his own, and the faculties that have made him master in the one could, with time, make

him master of the whole—but there isn't time.

When he has picked a pebble or two of knowledge from off earth's beach the summons comes to him to depart.

Gray's "Elegy" gives worthy expression to this tragic element in human experience :

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire ;
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.

Some village Hampden, that, with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood ;
Some mute, inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

*Chill penury repressed their noble rage
And froze the genial current of their souls.*

This is no abstract problem, but one that presses home very sorely upon our own experience. Souls are in bondage to circumstance, shut out from the sunshine of life and the broad spaciousness of opportunity, into narrow corners of dull routine or sordid drudgery, which make them ask why they ever were born, and make them long for death if only as a great and interesting adventure. All too often such souls turn to ways of sin

as to ways that are more interesting than the ways of goodness, the line of least resistance proving irresistibly attractive.

Sometimes when one has held out for some length of time, the diabolical whisper rises in the soul, " Now you deserve relaxation, you have earned a fling, let go " ; and each time the soul thus lets go its hold on God, and truth, and righteousness it rivets the bonds of sorrow and sin more tightly upon itself, and upon the race.

Oh ! for some reasonable faith which will lift us clear of these perplexities, and set us in the healing rays of Great Shining Hope.

I believe such faith is not only possible, but every soul must find it really to live. The path of faith is the only path of life.

The Fact of God

First of all, over against this problem we must assert the Fact of God believably.

" Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ? "

There can be no expectation of any help from the denial of God. It does not make the problem easier, it does not get rid of one solitary hard and untoward fact. To sur-

render faith in God in face of the hard facts of life is not to solve the riddle, but is *simply to give it up*. It only makes confusion worse confounded, and slams the door of hope in the face of the soul.

One might mention in passing that the most coolly atheistic of all philosophers, Nietzsche, is refreshingly logical in this regard. Having decided that there is no God, he goes on boldly to deny the right and the hope of betterment to the bulk of the race. He advocates instead a doctrine of savage self-preference on the part of those few who can most successfully exploit their fellows. The majority of the race are to become the weak and pliant tools of a limited and brutal aristocracy. That is the logical result of atheism.

We must assert, then, as our fundamental assumption, *God*, and God as the *Judge* of all the earth. With Him only dwells perfect justice. Only He is capable of comprehending the total scheme in which we play our part, and if we believe in Him at all we are bound to believe that He is just.

It is an instinct of the human soul to demand in God all virtue in perfection. It is really

just as incredible for every normal man as for Abraham in the old story to believe that the Judge of all the earth can fail to do right.

It is no true reverence for God which thinks of Him as above His own moral law, in the sense of His being able to disregard it. The moral obligations binding on men are binding only in proportion as they are seen to be the very nature of God Himself.

The wrong that pains my soul below
I dare not throne above.

We may, nay we *must*, believe that since there can be no explanation of earth's woe in the callousness or non-existence of God, that therefore the explanation lies only in His infinite love as the reason for all.

Accepting the belief, then, that a just and loving God is in control, two lines of possible explanation of the permission of the seeming injustices of this life present themselves :

1. An assumption concerning the past.
2. An assumption concerning the future.

The Doctrine of Karma

The assumption concerning the past to which I refer is that commonly known in

Eastern religious thought as the doctrine of Karma—a doctrine which has gained great headway in the West during the last decade or two. The doctrine is roughly this, that the *hardships* and *sufferings* of the soul in this present life are mainly to be explained as the results of misdeeds or simple failure to achieve in some previous existence.

It assumes the truth of reincarnation, and believes that the soul passes through quite a number of lives ever subject to the law of Karma (which means literally "doing"). The soul suffers in the succeeding life for the errors and sins of the life that preceded it.

Now this very ancient doctrine of Karma comes to us weighted by the adherence of the finest religious genius, apart from Christianity, that the world has known.

Moreover, it is worth while noting that the doctrine of Reincarnation which Karma presupposes was held by some of the Jews of our Lord's day, as is shown by the question of His disciples concerning the man born blind, "Did this man sin or his parents?" It is noticeable that Jesus does not rebuke or correct the assumption of a previous life made by the disciples—He addresses Himself simply

to the question of sinfulness. On the other hand, of course, He does not endorse it, and the apostles also are quite silent concerning the matter. When further, we look at other considerations, there are many things to be urged against this method of explaining the present by an appeal to the past.

1. In the first place it *explains really nothing*. It simply shifts the same problem of life's injustice back to a previous existence—the mind is bound to assume a beginning to the process—a first life when the soul finds itself immediately faced by the difficulties of this problem. This present life *feels* like such a first experience, and may very well be it.

2. To really believe that the suffering of some fellow-life, here and now, is due to well-merited divine punishment for sin, is surely to confuse moral issues in this present life. For example, could we feel right in relieving such a sufferer in view of the divine origin of his pain? Should we not be interfering with a divinely ordained and healthy process? The doctrine, if widely or strongly held, tends to the atrophy of sympathy. Indeed, in India, this doctrine of Karma has helped to

produce the most terrible and rigid system of caste known to the world.

3. A third reason against this view is that as a scheme of punishment it fails utterly, because the one thing needed is missing, namely, a memory of the sin committed, or the error for which one is held responsible. Punishment, especially of the remedial kind, is dependent entirely upon the punished soul concurring in the judgment that befalls it—seeing clearly where it is, or has been wrong, and acknowledging to the full the demerit which causes the suffering. It is impossible for us to do that if we have no memory of our past life.

There are a few people who profess to have memories of previous incarnation, but it is quite possible to meet these cases with alternative explanations, such as ancestral memory or self-suggestion.

Whatever rudimentary existence the entities we call our souls may have had previous to our emergence upon this earthly plane, nevertheless, the plain evidence points to this life as being our first existence as moral beings capable of sin or of goodness, of merit or demerit, of appreciating and furthering or

depreciating and hindering the purpose of our Maker.

The End is not Yet

We must turn then to the assumption concerning the future.

Christian belief has historically always pitted the Future against the Present and the Past. Its cry of victory has always been, "The end is not yet."

Even when the King of Terrors has rung down the curtain it has refused to think the play finished or arrested for ever. Sorrow and death are only intervals between the acts, and though it may seem to the onlooker that there are times when the Author is doing nothing—yet all the time behind the scenes the Author is arranging to bring the villain to judgment, and the hero to his reward, and to vindicate His play before all the world.

The riddle of this life's meaning is to be read by the light of two worlds : this world and the world to come.

It is not fair to the Master-worker to judge the work half way through. Had you seen Michael Angelo dealing with some block of marble there would have come a point in his

task where his angel would have had perchance but one foot and one eye and one wing, and you might have cried, "Unhappy creature! ugly misshapen monster, how useless and wasteful to produce a thing so maimed and wretched!" And you would have been wrong, the injustice you decried would have been only *the limit of your seeing*. The great artist was even then—as you spoke—hurrying to add the other eye and hand and foot and wing, and cause the strange and blighted creature to stand forth as the angel of God.

Similarly, God is not finished, even when this life is over, with any one of us. He has chosen a work that takes even God time—takes Him time because by its very nature it must be a gradual work of growth. It is the greatest work He can do, for God never does aught unworthy of God, and whilst we cry out our pitiful cries of little faith, He, to whom a thousand years is but as a day, is moving like the lightning to the completion of His task.

Trust Him and wait—and wait not wearily and idly, but busily. Remember what it means to *rest* in the Lord. This is what it means, "Take My yoke upon you, for My yoke

is easy and My burden is light." Follow Christ.

Let God have His way in your soul and life, and you shall see immediately injustice everywhere yielding place to justice, order emerging from chaos. Even in your own heart faith shall rise like an inexhaustible fountain in every desert land and every barren time.

The works of God are to be manifested—and in that manifestation will be found all sufficient and joyful reason for the pains of our growth. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us; for the whole creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

There is nothing of good missed now that shall not then be found.

There shall never be one lost good,
On the earth the broken arc—in the heaven the perfect
round.

VI

“IF IT WERE NOT SO”

A Faith to pierce the Darkest Cloud

A NEW age of death has fallen upon the world. To the enormous casualties of the Great War there has succeeded the awful death-roll of pestilence and starvation in many parts of the world. Millions have already been hurled from one world to another, and already the loss of a few more seems to leave us far less moved than it did. Yet the new callousness is very superficial, and there is no doubt that Death is a much more vivid reality to us all to-day than it ever has been.

The Christian has a faith for such a time—a faith whose light can pierce the darkest cloud, and if ever that faith needed to shine it needs to shine now amid this widespread woe that has newly come upon the world.

To this faith Jesus has set the seal of His personal assurance, saying, " If it were not so, I would have told you."

The Fear of Death

The words were spoken in definite response to the panic-stricken condition of the disciples. Christ's announcement of His approaching death struck fear into their minds. Many of us know by our own experience something of what they felt. We know the awful chill that the threat of death spreads over the spirit. Like a blast of icy wind it drives away the red blood of the soul's life.

The fear and chill of death comes to us in at least two ways.

There is the fear for ourselves. The threat of one's own death seldom leaves one unmoved or unafraid. Such fear is natural to all animals, the human included. It may be overcome in various ways, but all know it. Some natures and constitutions are less susceptible to it than others, but none entirely escape it. Many a saint has been deeply distressed by the revelation within of an almost chronic fear of death.

Yet when we grasp intelligently the fact

that this fear is in the first place part of nature's mechanism for the preservation of life, her precaution against undue risk or over-exertion, we begin at once to find deliverance from its tyranny. Like all physical conditions, it can be intensified or reduced by the operation of the mind. The mind recognises this fear of death as a *servant of life*, and not a forerunner of decay.

In the second place, however, the recoil of the soul from the fate of the body is a testimony to the soul's different nature and destiny. The fear of death is thus seen to be due, in the main, to the soul's preference for life—a preference which our soul is constantly registering, and registering passionately. We want so much to live that the prospect of death appals us. If death were the natural end of the soul we should not fear it, but welcome it. It would not distress us. It is just because it cuts across our cherished plans and hopes, our holiest purposes and ambitions, that we fear it so.

In other words, the reverse side of the fear of death is an assurance of life. It is the *soul protesting*, and why should the soul do anything like that if its protest has no reason

in it, and no likelihood of being respected. We carry at the centre of our human constitution an assurance of future life in the recoil of our souls from death as an end. In other words, " If it were not so, God would have told us." At our heart we carry something of the answer to our fears and yearnings.

But the fear of death attacks us in a much more poignant way yet, through those we love. " Who hath not lost a friend ? " and the poet spoke truly who declared :

This is lordly man's down-lying,
This his slow but sure declining,
Star by star his world resigning.

To see loved ones depart, and to have to face life without the cheer of their audible and visible presence, this is to feel the pain of death indeed, and to understand why Russell Lowell could write : " We rather seem the dead who 're left behind."

Yet, as in the former case there is a reverse side to the fear of death in this form. Taken at its root-meaning it bears testimony to a divine whisper of love eternal at our heart. Take the instance before us. The disciples were troubled in heart, but their trouble was eloquent of their love for Jesus. All their

sense of His spiritual value to them was quickened by the threat of death. Alas ! how true it is we do not value things until we lose or nearly lose them ? What are the flowers upon the grave but the silent yet eloquent witness of a quickened sense of the value of the one who is gone ?

Oh ! for a heart the living to love,
Before the living are dead !

But at least it is better to *miss* our dear ones than not to *feel their loss*. How terrible it would be if we could let mother, father, husband, or wife, go, and not miss them. Turn the cloud of your sorrow about and look at this silver lining ! Why this lingering memory ? Why this imperishability of the bond that holds you to one who is gone, if he be lost for ever ? If love is undying what is that love but God's assertion in your own heart that your loved one can never die, and can never be hidden for ever from your sight and knowledge ? Here again, the fear of death, seen rightly, carries with it God's whisper of hope. We may be sure that " if it were *not* " as we hope " He would have told us. "

The Assurance of Christ

But the victory over the fear of death is perfected by Christ's positive and definite answer to our doubts.

There are several passages in which Jesus unveils for us the life to be, such as the story of the Transfiguration, His talk with the Sadducees, His parable of Dives and Lazarus, His prayer before Calvary, the stories associated with the Resurrection, but *the vital truths* are all summarised in these familiar verses of the fourteenth of St. John. Here, basing the whole matter with peculiar intensity on *His Own pledged word*, He tells us that :

There is a future life. Thus it is no longer problematic whether after death a man lives again. The Christian cannot doubt Jesus, and for him this degree of the controversy is concluded. In the Father's house are many "rooms," says Jesus. Many rooms, and souls pass from one to the other. That is death ! Just the exchanging of one room for another, and every room is part of the Home !

It is well to contrast the gropings of science and the speculations of philosophy on this

matter with the quiet royalty of knowledge evinced by Jesus.

It was seldom Jesus ever concerned Himself with negatives. All the greatest truths—God, sin, love, forgiveness—He asserts and assumes. Perhaps, therefore, it is the more emphatic when here He deigns to notice the negative possibility, “ If it were not so ”; and notices it only to shatter it with the hammer of His personal reliability, “ I would have told you.”

The words imply, of course, that Jesus is in the most intimate counsels of the Father, that He dwells at the centre of reality, and *knows* what is and is not. All we know of Jesus fits into this claim. His sinlessness would deliver Him from many a subtle twist and error of the understanding, from every distorting suspicion of God’s purposes and ways. His perfect obedience to the Father set His soul bare to the light of God, so that He knew, not with our poor, slow, logical knowledge, but with lightning flash of spiritual revelation and direct intuition of truth. “ Who knoweth,” asks Paul, “ the things of a man save the spirit of the man, and who the things of God save the Spirit of God ? ”

Because Jesus was the perfect vehicle of the Spirit of God, He knew the things of God in all their height and length and depth and breadth. To Jesus it was inconceivable that had things been otherwise than He saw them He would not have known. The utter truthfulness of His relation to humanity is laid bare in this amazing utterance.

Jesus asks us to believe His personal testimony, and what better or more reasonable thing can we do ?

There is a destiny for the individual. He is not absorbed into the ocean of being again. He goes on for ever and ever.

The emphasis laid here upon the individual is amazing. "I go to prepare a place for *you*," says Jesus. Death for His disciples is just Christ's personal return for them one by one. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself." The hopes of heaven are centred upon your advent and your destiny, just as the hopes of your home were centred there on that happy day when you arrived within this earthly sphere. Then you found a "place prepared for you"—loving hands were there to welcome you in—love had been busy for long, thinking, planning, and

toiling for you. Death is just birth into a higher sphere and a new family—no more lonely than birth, and with just the same centralising of interest, care, and hope upon the individual soul.

The loneliness of death is all appearance and no reality. If you are thinking of some dear lad dying away there in a foreign land, so far from kith and kin, and the dear hands and voices that would have hushed him to rest, don't think of him as "lonely" in his death. There was a "place prepared for him," and loving hands to show him welcome, and angelic presences to cheer and comfort him. Shortly before Dr. Llewellyn Bevan passed to his rest, so recently, in Mrs. Bevan's own words "he stretched forth his hand, and looked so eager and glad and said, 'The Lord, the Master, Jesus Christ ! ' "

This truth merges into the further revelation.

There is a real personal re-union and fellowship in the future life. Here is the crowning promise, "That where I am ye may be also." The lost leader is to be restored to His followers. The dear departed one will be restored in due time. It is not only Christ

Who will be restored. "Them also that are asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Remember that this insistence by Jesus on the necessity to Himself of your presence through eternity, is true for all His other disciples as for you. All of them will therefore be found with Him, and therefore with you. Is not this a miracle of grace ? That Jesus should desire your company and mine ! What value can our fellowship be to him ? Yet how He insists. This promise He repeats later as a prayer, "Father, I will that those whom Thou has given me be with me where I am." And whilst there is deep joy in feeling that desire of His directed to myself, there is rapture in realising that it is similarly directed to those I love, and that in "departing to be with Jesus" one is inevitably bound again "into the sheaf of kindred hearts."

What a fellowship that will be !—centred in Christ !—cleansed and elevated by His presence ! If death means this, is it not true that for us "to die is gain" ?

Walk in the Light

St. Chrysostom, that golden-tongued orator of the early Church, has a very beautiful

passage in one of his sermons, gently upbraiding the Christians of his day for too pagan a sorrow concerning death. I draw three illustrations from that passage.

Suppose you were possessed of a beloved house, a country seat, an ancestral hall, and it was tumbling into ruin, its beautiful lines melting away under the stress of weather and the wear and tear of time. Would you complain if the builders came and dismantled it still further, and broke more ruinously its walls, if they did it simply to rebuild the house again in all its pristine glory and beloved beauty ? That is death.

If you possessed the statue of a loved one, and it was chipped and broken here and there, and tottering to a fall, would you be sad if one came and threw it into the furnace, thence to recast it anew into the mould of its original loved lineaments, causing the appearance of your friend to live before you in greater truth than ever ? Yet that is death.

Suppose your daughter married and went across the seas to a land of beauty and a life of prosperity with a loyal and loving husband. Would you be sad ? Only for a while, only till you remembered her promise and his that

you should go to them in a little while, and share all the glory of the new land and the love of the new home. Yet that is death.

Let us, then, give up the troubled heart. The world is watching us. It is a death-stricken, woeful world, waiting for a clear word about death and sin and sorrow. That word we have, a Living Word. Do we believe Him ? Christianity is a religion of personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, " If it were not so, I would have told you." Do we believe Him ?

If we truly believe, then " joy unspeakable and full of glory " will chase away our gloom and sadness. We shall be no longer as those that " sit in the shadow of death," but as those upon whose faces there shines a golden glory—the glory of the " land that is fairer than day."

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VII

“ BEAUTY FOR ASHES ”

Christ's Ministry to the Bereaved

THE opening passage of Isaiah lxi. has been described by Henry Drummond as the Programme of Christianity.

It is a just title, for our Lord used the verses in the synagogue at Nazareth to inaugurate His ministry. He regarded them as adequately expressing His purpose in the world. What a programme it is !

Good tidings to the meek—or poor.
The binding up of the broken-hearted.
Liberty for the captives.
Comfort for the mourners.
Beauty for ashes.
Oil of joy for mourning.
The praise-garment for the heavy-spirited.

One notices immediately how considerable a part of it is devoted to the comfort of the bereaved.

Christ comes as the champion of all that are oppressed, whether by sin or by their fellow-men, or by sorrow and misfortune, but here He chooses to lay special emphasis upon His deliverance of those who are oppressed by death.

It is important for us, however, to realise that the comfort Christ offers us has to be as much deliberately chosen as anything else in life. All things come to us through the Gates of Will. God respects our personality too much, He is too much of a "Gentleman," to thrust His comfort upon us intrusively. Even should He do so He would have indeed no sure guarantee that we should accept and use it. Certain souls even then would spurn it. Always there are some who, like Rachel of old, "refuse to be comforted." Because *their* happiness has been crossed they shut themselves up to their disappointment until their souls turn bitter; they shut out Jesus and His teaching, and then complain that religion does not help them.

What, then, does Jesus offer us, when we are plunged in this deepest of human woes? He offers us a threefold transformation of the situation.

Beauty for Ashes

What a great word this is ! How literally true. Take death at its worst, without Jesus ; insist on facing its apparent meaning in all its grim, repulsive horror ; let your thought be chained to the grave and its contents, and the result is “ ashes.”

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust : that is the end of life—without Jesus.

How eloquent of the general hopelessness of the human outlook before Jesus, was that sad practice of sitting in sackcloth and ashes in which the bereaved of those dark days indulged ! Ashes upon the head ! What a symbol ! The human, glorious with life, vibrating with mind and meaning, splendid in love, terrific in idealism, overtopped with dust !

That is the prospect that unbelief holds out for the race. Let there be no doubt of it. We are sometimes bidden to surrender the idea of individual immortality in the interests of a racial perfection. Yet in view of what science prophesies of the ultimate cooling of the globe if every individual turns to dust, where is there scope or possibility for

achieving anything *permanent* for the race ? The universe becomes one vast dust destructor, flinging up new and ever temporary forms only to fling them back to dust again. Unbelief makes of human destiny nothing but a gigantic ash-heap. Can anything so repulsive be the truth ? Must not truth be beautiful at last ? Is it without significance that unbelief culminates in ugliness and horror, that it leaves you, for that beautiful soul you once knew and still love, only "ashes" ? As Tennyson believed :

My own dim life should teach me this :
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is.

Set over against that picture of horror and despair such visions as Jesus has inspired and guaranteed by His most solemn personal assurances. Think, for example, of that beautiful passage in Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, a parable instinct with Christ's teaching from beginning to end, in which we see little Tyltyl and Myltyl creep into the churchyard at the witching hour of midnight to see the dead come forth from their graves. As the clock strikes the hour the graves open, and

from them come forth, not the dead, but great masses of beautiful flowers which transform the cemetery into a garden of glorious life and beauty. Beauty for ashes indeed ! A garland for ashes in truth ! And into the minds of the children comes the stupendous revelation, *there are no dead !* The grave has no victory !

This is what Jesus would teach us of our dear departed as we stand by their graves. That which indeed He taught of Himself by resurrection. “ He is not here, He is risen.” “ Why seek ye the living amongst the dead ? ”

A New Order of Life

Let Jesus control our mind, and He will, oh ! so gently, but so thoroughly, release it from its bondage to the grave and the “ cast-off clothes of the soul,” now fast passing to ashes, and He will fix our thought instead on the *Beauty of a New Order of Life*. “ The Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne doth feed them, and lead them unto fountains of water of life, and there shall be no more curse, and His servants shall do Him service, and the Lord God shall be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

Let Jesus speak to us, and He will draw our attention away from the broken home, with its awful blank and silence, to the Father's Home of Many Rooms, where ring again the voices we love, and where dwell in peace and joy and happy service those disciples for whom Christ has already come.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust :
Thou madest man, he knows not why ;
He thinks he was not made to die ;
And Thou hast made him—Thou art just.

The second transformation that Jesus will work for us is

“The Oil of Joy for Mourning”

This phrase interpreted means that Jesus will heal in the bereaved the sense of loss. For that terrible feeling of “a blank” He will substitute a sense of gain. He will heal the mind, He will “bind up the broken in heart,” if you will let Him. He is the true Physician of the soul. Beware of false ones.

We are sometimes told by well-meaning friends that Time is a great healer. And perhaps we know something of the dull resentment it arouses in us—how it outrages our sense of dignity in sorrow. For

what does the phrase really mean? Simply, that man has a short memory.

Now, we ought to feel it to be the grossest sacrilege to forget our holy dead. Dr. Osler, of Oxford, accuses Christian believers of, as he terms it, “counting out of their lives” those whom they profess to believe to be immortal. If true, it is a very sad thing. It is certainly against the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament. Jesus did not “count out” Moses and Elijah. They spoke with Him in the mount. He constantly speaks as though heaven were quite near. The writer to the Hebrews did not “count out” the saints who had sealed their testimony in martyrdom. “Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.” “We are come unto the assembly of the first-born, unto the spirits of the just made perfect.” The author of Revelation is quite convinced about the continued “service” of the exalted disciple, and it is difficult to see what “service” of God could be so necessary and urgent as that in which you and I are engaged—the redemption of the earth. No! Jesus is against our “counting them out.” He will heal us, not with the ignoble healing of forget-

fulness, but with the nobler comfort of ever stronger memory. If we will let Him, He will bring us into communion with our dead.

I do not say this lightly, but speak, if I may say so, from personal experience of Christ's power to make real for *me* those "invisible presences" I love so dearly.

What is the chief aim of the Christian life ? It is surely to realise with ever-increasing adequacy the presence of the Invisible Christ. Like another soul of old, we seek to "endure as seeing Him Who is invisible." If this is so, and if it is the typical Christian experience that faithful attention to the Lord Jesus Christ produces the conviction, the sensation, purely spiritual, but often overwhelming, of that august yet beautiful Presence, then *similar faithful attention to those other dear invisibles should yield us a like satisfaction that still they live and love us still.* This is the true Christian spiritualism. Not the quasi-materialism that seeks visible effects, that will not believe till it *sees*, but the communion of saints conveyed and controlled by communion with the Lord.

Again I turn to *The Blue Bird*, and take

from it this lovely idea. The old grandparents only return to life, or rather their life only becomes apparent to the children, when the *children think of them*. That same kind of thing often happens in our ordinary experience. Have you never been in the presence of an absent-minded man, who neither saw you nor heard you? You were *out of his world of reality* for the time being.

Similarly, we are sadly absent-minded concerning the spiritual world, concerning Christ and those He has gathered to His Nearer Presence. As George MacDonald says in one of his poems, "If our souls could see, it would all be shown"; and we train our soul's vision so poorly, sometimes not at all.

It seems sad that the world, in its hunger for its departed loves, should be running after a spiritualism that lends itself so easily to fraud, when there is awaiting it a communion with Christ, which conveys, without fraud or doubt, the sense of the continued life and interest of our dead. Of this every soul may make its own experiment. Just as God Himself says to us, "Be still, and know that I am," so our late companions of the

flesh are whispering to us, " Be still, and know that WE ARE."

The disappearing forms of our beloved dead draw the ardent gaze of our souls after them, and teach us the art of seeing the invisible. So faith mounts on the sable wings of death, and the grave becomes the gate of new life for the living as well as the dead.

Open your minds and hearts, then, to these other presences. They, like Christ, are

Closer than breathing,
Nearer than hands or feet.

Jesus told His disciples that it was expedient for them that He should go away so that the Spirit might come to them. As Henry Drummond says, " He went away to be nearer." The same is true of those others who have gone away to be " with Him where He is." They, too, would we only believe it, are nearer to us. They see us now from the spiritual side, *from our own point of view*. How much better they must understand us ! They are with us without the limitations of this earthly flesh. Jesus has turned our loss to gain ! He has given us " the oil of joy for mourning."

Lord, make me one with Thine own faithful ones,
Thy saints who love Thee, and are loved by Thee,
Till the day break and till the shadows flee.
At one with them in alms and orisons ;
At one with him who toils and him who runs,
And him who yearns for union yet to be ;
At one with all who throng the crystal sea,
And wait the setting of our moons and suns.
Ah, my beloved ones gone on before,
Who looked not back, with hand upon the plough !
If beautiful to me while still in sight,
How beautiful must be your aspects now,
Your unknown well-known aspects in that light
Which clouds shall never cloud for evermore.

The Garment of Praise

But also Jesus gives us “ The Garment of Praise for the Spirit of heaviness.”

Now, this takes us very much further, and I wonder if we are strong enough for it. This concerns our bearing before the world as well as our inward state of soul. The writer of these words was thinking in all this story of transformation, of its effect upon the godless world. Notice the words which follow : “ That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.” This sorrow of ours may be infinite benediction to other lives if God proves His salvation in us. Oh, that

spirit of heaviness ! The clogged weight of our footsteps in life ! The long years stretching wearily ahead of us ! How shall we " walk and not faint "? " They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." They shall exchange heaviness for praise. Yes, for *praise* !

Is there no room for that great change ? It happens repeatedly that happy lives grow small and empty. Two lives may be amazingly happy in their perfect unison ; and to hold that sweet fellowship in security for a large number of years is very desirable; yet it may not be the most desirable thing. A curious inner restlessness often afflicts lives so blessed. A sense of something wanting, a lack of adventure, the palling of the usual and the constant, and life, though happy, seems small and ineffective.

But when great Death comes, how he enlarges our horizon ! How ruthlessly he bursts open the four walls of our prison of delight, and how imperiously he summons our soul into the vast spaces of another world ! He lifts from the human to the divine. He calls us from self to God—from our own happiness to God's cause. Though

life for us grows painful, yet for all its sorrow it grows more solemn, more grand, more full of meaning and dignity. Time is opened up into eternity. We see ourselves, not the children of earth, denizens of the dust, but children of the Everlasting Day, citizens of heaven.

Undoubtedly, the tendency of bereavement is to give to souls a fresh interest in the spiritual world and in spiritual values. It may be, alas, often only a temporary interest. But, while it lasts, it is a great opportunity of better things. It is gain emerging from loss. If it leads on to a testing of God's reality, to the putting to the proof of His love and salvation, then indeed the “oil of joy” may flood the mourning soul, and all its hurt be healed and its sorrow turned to song.

Let us believe that God does not take these dear companions from us but for the soundest of reasons, with the most loving of purposes. They have gone to Him because He needed them. And doubtless before He took them He surveyed the earthly ranks of His followers and faithful souls, and asked, “Now, who is strong enough to bear

this sorrow for My cause ? " He chose *you*. Be honoured in that choice. Let it sanctify and dignify your life henceforth. Be exalted in the exaltation of your dearest and best. Let this new-found glory and joy be your greatest comfort. Let go your grief and take up the harp of everlasting praise to God, Who calls us from the smallness of earthly happiness to the grandeur of suffering for His great designs. And when the world sees *that* in you, it will be startled and convicted, and will believe. Thus your sorrow and that sacred death that grieves you shall be, like Christ's own travail, for the redemption and healing of human souls. Your spirit shall thus be clothed in a lovely garment of Praise.

VIII

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

A Re-Interpretation

A HUNDRED years ago you and I were not here. A hundred years hence, and these places will not know us. Will the drift carry us utterly apart from one another, as the sea carries from each other “ ships that pass in the night ” ? Will broken family circles ever be re-formed ; old friendships, long severed, be knitted up ? Is it true, as Mrs. Hemans so beautifully puts it, that “ Into the sheaf of kindred hearts thou shalt be bound again ? ”

What such questions as these mean let bereaved hearts tell. A great yearning is making itself felt in the hearts of men and women everywhere, for some clear, definite, comprehensive doctrine of the future life, and what we may expect therein. And it is with the confession that the Church is far too vague and unsatisfactory in her customary presentation of the great hope, that I make the attempt

to present a clear doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

The place of the body in Christian doctrine is much larger than is commonly realised. You cannot read the New Testament without feeling that. Think of the attention Jesus gave the body in His healing miracles, in His parables, in His loving pursuit of those who sinned in bodily ways. Above all, the fact of the Incarnation is the supreme emphasis upon the body. It means that God could not reach us with final redemptive power save at that point in our experience where we fail most lamentably, and where our need of Him is greatest—namely, in our contact with the material world, in the life of the flesh.

The moral struggle for every one of us, as the story of Eden suggests, is the control of physical desire. The body is the focus of our first soul-struggle ; it is the arena prepared beforehand in which we win the spurs of our moral and spiritual knighthood. The “deeds done in the body” are the making or the marring of the soul, and both Christ and St. Paul warn us that it is upon such very practical things that the judgment of God will fall.

Yet there seems to be in man a chronic shyness of his body, as though he were afraid of his flesh. To that nervousness he succumbs in two ways. Either he gives way to the body and becomes carnal, lustful, degraded into the beast, or else he represses, and stultifies, and ill-treats his body as a hateful thing, bans it from thought and attention as corrupt, and holds it in an unhealthy contempt.

We may put it this way. Either the body runs away with the soul, or the soul runs away from the body.

The latter policy accounts for the monastic and ascetic movements in the Church. Yet we too have our type of just this policy in that false spirituality which shirks physical and political problems, refuses to cleanse the cesspools of social life, and leaves them to breed pestilence unchallenged—a spirituality aloof from real life, vacuous, stagnant, impotent, illusory, utterly ineffective for world redemption.

One result of this type of thought has been a tendency to resort to the Greek conception of immortality, and to despise all ideas of bodily resurrection. This accounts for the fact that the modern pulpit presentation of

immortality has been far too "ghostly," too abstract to be of real comfort to the bereaved heart.

In spite of the fact that for many souls the doctrine of the resurrection of the body seems impossible of belief, they are not really satisfied with the shadow-like coldness and emptiness of the pure spirit view. You try to think only of the spirit of your departed lover or friend, and you are sensible of a distinct repulsion and rebuff to your feeling. It seems so much less than this life, as vague and unsubstantial as a dream. The point is, as one writer has cleverly expressed it, that "we have offered mankind a conception which to the intellect is a puzzle, and to the imagination a blank."

That is it. The theory of purely spiritual survival gives no grip or handle to the imagination ; it puts our loved one too far away, and makes him less living, instead of more alive. All unconsciously modern thought has been slipping back into the very kind of thing that both our Lord and St. Paul combated in their teaching. It will be instructive to see how these teachings coincide.

The crucial passage of our Lord's teaching

is in St. Luke xx. 34-36: "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage." Jesus is disputing with the Sadducees, who were defenders of the older Jewish view of Sheol, the place of departed spirits. They believed that after death the shadowy soul of the departed went to a shadowy realm to live a shadowy existence, a mere pale reflection of the warm life of earth, a depreciated life. They based their teaching on certain passages from the Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes, such as "A land of darkness, as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where light is as darkness." "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest."

The Sadducees held this view of merely spiritual survival in recoil from the exaggerations of the Pharisees concerning a material hereafter. Under the stress of the ideas of a material kingdom of the Messiah there had grown up coarse and fanciful notions of physical life in the future state very similar to the "houri" paradise of the Mohammedans. In fact, it is curious to note the parallelism

between these two forms of thought and Buddhism on the one hand and Mohammedanism on the other.

You see, then, the point of the Sadducees' question to Christ. They were ridiculing the idea of a physical element in the next life. Notice how our Lord in His reply exalts the whole matter and lets in a flood of light.

1. He emphasises the moral issue in death. "Those that are worthy to obtain that world." Death is judgment.

2. He uses the phrase "resurrection from the dead," not "resurrection of the body." Evidently, by the use of the word "resurrection" He recognises some connection between the dead organism and the new life.

3. Equally evident is it that our Lord rejects the Pharisaic view of a complete identity between our earthly and heavenly bodies. They are connected, they bear a certain likeness to each other, but are not identical. "They are as the angels in heaven."

Now turn to St. Paul. The 15th chapter of the 1st Corinthians gives us a clear statement of St. Paul's views. The important passage reads thus: "With what body do they come?" "Thou sowest not that body which

shall be." "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body."

The situation St. Paul is dealing with, however, is rather different from that which confronted our Lord. The Greek world, to whom Paul was writing, threw its emphasis upon pure thought, intellect, as distinguished from the feelings. Apathy was, to the Greek mind, a characteristic of the gods. We know how the stoic nature, with all emotion repressed, appealed to the Greeks. The highest life was the life of contemplation. Corresponding to this was the tendency to regard the body as evil, or at least a serious hindrance.

This view, even in Christian circles, had serious effects. Some Christians actually argued, with that sophistry beloved of the Greek mind, that since the body was evil it simply did not count in the moral struggle; its sins were no sins at all, but natural and inevitable. We know how immortality intruded itself into the Corinthian church.

The Body Involved in Judgment

St. Paul's problem, then, was to reveal the sacredness of the body, and his writings do so in a very solemn way. The body is in-

volved in judgment; it vitally affects the resurrection. It should be the temple of the Holy Ghost; its misuse brings terrible penalties.

Thus, according to both Christ and St. Paul, the body is an important element in our salvation. St. Paul is also equally emphatic about the natural and spiritual bodies not being the same, whilst yet they are vitally connected. Obviously, for both our Lord and St. Paul there is some clear significance in the idea of the resurrection of the body.

In what sense, then, are we to understand it ?

I. Not in the sense of the rising out of the grave of the old body—the cast-off clothes of the soul.

The idea that at a given time the chaos of scattered human remains will come together, re-formed into the bodies known and used here, is grotesque in itself and sufficiently repulsive to render it impossible for most Christian minds. Does God Who gave us our first body with such exquisite and natural development need to gather together ghastly remains and relics and dust from the four winds, for any such purpose ? St. Paul is not using

language any too strong when he says, " Foolish man ! Thou sowest not the body that shall be."

2. Yet the new body has connection with the old. It is related to it by what St. Paul calls the grain, or seed.

Now St. Paul can mean by this grain or seed nothing less than the soul, that fundamental life which is formative of the body. " To every seed," he says later on, " its own body." " Its own " in what sense ? In the sense of the body which it is appropriate and possible for that fundamental principle of life, the seed or soul, to produce. It is an interesting fact that the Greek word for life and for soul are the same, and it is easy to see how appropriate the symbol of the seed is as a picture of the soul's journey from body to body.

Everything in our knowledge of the relation of body and soul points to the primary importance and dominance of the soul. Thought controls action ; the soul rules the body, well or ill, for life or for death. The soul spins the body as the spider its web, and the life or soul in us changes every atom of the body every seven years. Already the soul

has risen from body to body in its progress, or, to put it more truly, already body has risen from body by means of the great vital connection of the living grain, or the soul.

The New Body

It is not, then, to the rising of the new body out of the grave that the phrase resurrection of the body should refer at all, but to its rising from the previous body, whether that be in or out of the grave, dead or living, at the present moment. The new body is determined in its quality, in the order of its life, by our life in the body here on earth.

Certain illustrations may help us.

An artist paints his first picture. He pours into it all the ardour of his artistic soul. By that first picture his artist-soul finds development, and is poured forth again in a second picture. Looking at the two pictures, you can almost measure the soul-growth that has occurred. You can sometimes specify the actual changes. Strictly speaking, the second picture is a resurrection from the first ; it has, as we commonly say, arisen through it. So by successive expressions in successive bodies the artist-soul climbs to its full development.

It is judged by all mankind by "the deeds done in the body."

Similarly, a man writes a book, or preaches a sermon, and the reaction from that first effort at expression yields him a soul demanding nobler expression, and a second book or sermon "rises" from the first.

This is, indeed, the principle upon which the trees continue their life. Their soul, or life, pours itself forth in leaves. These leaves are themselves a breathing apparatus yielding a rich reaction to the trees, which are enabled thus to produce entirely new bodies, or leaves, year by year.

So the human soul, by its governance of the body of this life, develops the power to produce a spiritual body, or, to put it another way, obtains the fitness that enables God to give it in the life to come "its own body," the body for which it has qualified. We can actually see this process in operation. Look at the man of evil thought and ignoble life: mark how coarse, repulsive, and evil-looking his body becomes. See the man of noble thoughts and pure life, and the autumn of his life is like the autumn of nature, resplendent with unearthly glory.

The body-building power of the soul is largely conditioned by its use of the body here and now. Body rises from body by way of the soul. This is the resurrection of the body.

The Scaffolding of Flesh

In the building of a cathedral or temple the skeleton body, the probationary body, what we call the scaffolding, precedes the final structure. Even so, the spiritual temple of man's eternal habitation rises by means of the scaffolding of the mortal flesh. Let the full beauty and value of this truth quietly possess our minds. What emphasis it gives to the sacredness of the bodily life ! The New Testament knows nothing of a spirituality which has no effects in the life of the body and upon civilisation. It does not teach a fruitless, but a fruitful, spirituality. Fruit is one of its great words. The soul's wrestle with material environment is essential to the soul's growth. "In your patience," said our Lord, "ye shall win your souls."

Was there ever greater need than in our day to realise the sacredness of bodily life, when unnameable sins are destroying the "temples of the Holy Ghost" by thousands ?

One of the supreme horrors of war is the awful indignity done to the human body.

And how dear to us is the body of him we love ! We cannot picture his spirit without the form. The dear hands, the sweet frank eyes, the noble brow, the manly form, are these gone for ever ? Nay, they have but crumbled to be re-formed in nobler mould, and you do right to picture him as you have known him.

It means also the persistence of individuality.

Somehow, it is difficult for us to think of pure spirit individualised without form. The conception is too ghostly for our minds to grasp. The promise of the new body stamps the future life with distinctness and individuality. The look we knew so well, the trick of feature, the play of humour, the uniqueness of the one we mourn will not be lost. There is no merging and losing in that future life, Individuality will be more strong, not less, because expression in the new body will be ampler and richer.

Then, finally, it means the certainty of recognition. " To every ' soul ' its own body." Then you need not fear that he will be changed

beyond your knowing. There is continuity as well as development. It will be he and not another :

Eternal form will still divide
Eternal soul from all beside,
And I shall know him when we meet.

So—and here is the great gain of this truth—you may picture your loved ones with assurance in that Better Land. You do no violence to the truth when you clothe them, not in mere ghostly form, but in warm glorious health of bodily life, in a body of greater powers, but of superior, not inferior life.

There is a flesh of fish, and of beast, and of man, as there is a glory of star, and of moon, and of sun ; but there is also a “flesh” of the “spirit” a “spiritual body,” and “as we have borne the image of the earthly, so we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” :

Laddie, beloved laddie ! how soon should we cease to weep,
Could we glance through the golden gateway whose keys the angels keep ?
Yet love, our love that is deathless, can follow you where you roam,
Over the hills of God, laddie, the beautiful hills of Home.

IX

JESUS—THE HOME-MAKER

Jnl

Problems of Reunion

WHAT bright pictures the New Testament gives us when it presents Jesus in touch with death! They remind one of the rainbow—the bright sunshine of divine hope striking athwart the blinding rain of tears followed constantly by the “clear outshining after rain.” The story of the restoring of her son to the widow of Nain is typical of them all, and like all the miracles is full of parable. It depicts for us a need as wide as the world, and it shows us God’s satisfaction for that need. “And He delivered him to his mother.”

Never was that need so poignant as it is to-day. With many hearts broken with bereavement and others breaking with suspense, it is well for us to face again this

picture of the Saviour's compassion for the bereaved soul, and of His will and power to restore.

One inevitable result of the War is the renewed interest it has produced in the life after death.

Before the War there seemed to be a growing indifference to immortality. In one enquiry that was conducted, out of 3000 and odd replies received to the question, "Is immortality a matter of vital consequence to you ?" there was a majority of 500 for the verdict, No ! The fault doubtless lay in part with the churches, whose teachings about the future life have been very unsatisfactory and confused, and of questionable value or attractiveness. As one of our leading divines has said, "The division of the future life between perpetual church on the one hand and perpetual gaol on the other has been felt as a cruel injustice to the hopes and needs of humanity."

Well, the War has changed all that. It has forced a new sanity into our conceptions of what awaits us beyond the grim shadow we call death. For never was human happiness so direfully threatened. The very stuff

of which life is made—the fellowship which is life itself—is being torn to shreds. Whatever our class of society it is our proudest boast that “we love our homes.” We find the very wealth of life in the human loves of life. It may be said that all history is the story of how man has tried to make a happy home. Happy because secure, unmoved by the flux of time and the wreck of circumstance. It is the story also of his perpetual failure. “Home, sweet Home” is our favourite song, but half its beauty is due to the wistful longing it inspires for the fireside fellowships of the past that the onward march of life has broken up.

How true it is that, “no man liveth to himself”; we live in others, and if they cease to live, we die too. Loneliness is death, fellowship is life. Heaven will not be heaven except certain dear familiar faces are there. Here is the sharpest point of human woe, and what have we to say in answer to it? Does God care? Is He on the side of man’s long pathetic search for a home, secure, comfortable, enduring, satisfying, happy? The answer of the Christian Gospel is emphatic. “He is!” and only in the following of His

will can that Everlasting Home be found. And in this matter, as in all others, Jesus is the Measure of God. Jesus is supremely—

The Home-Maker

What a re-making of home this story suggests. Can you guess the widow's anguish as she follows the body of her only son ? It is not those who leave us who die, it is those who remain. The agony of death is felt most by the living. Jesus "delivered him unto her." Jesus gave him back, re-made the home, and re-made it, you may be sure, with a new element of holiness in it—a ceaseless fountain of wonder, awe, and gratitude at the heart of it. The home that Christ remakes becomes Home indeed.

Look at other pictures of the same thing. He is at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. If only He were made welcome at every wedding—present at the first making of the home ! How much after-sorrow might be spared. Some one has suggested beautifully that the inner meaning of the wine miracle at Cana is that only Christ can preserve the first sparkle and delight of married bliss. The long discipline of the years is apt to exhaust

the exhilarations of love, unless they are fed perpetually from the central source of Love Divine. Souls whose love is thus constantly refreshed are able to declare, "Thou has kept the best wine unto the last."

Then there is the story of Jairus and his little daughter ; the story of Lazarus and his sisters. Everywhere the fact of reunion shining through the mist of bereavement.

Think, too, of Jesus as the re-maker of homes in another sense, in view of other miracles. The man born blind ! He had never looked upon his parents—had never seen the face of her who bore him ! What a home-coming was that for those parents when the soul of their child became visible in the eyes so long sealed ! Wherein also is a parable. Does no new tenderness of love and wisdom of understanding come to pass in the home where Christ is present — the Mediator between parent and child, and the Divine Interpreter of soul to soul ?

Think of the story of the Leper—outcast from kith and kin—driving everybody from him with the hoarse cry, "Unclean ! unclean !" Jesus touched him *and he went home*. Can you measure the mother's joy,

the father's wondering gratitude, the wife's tremulous hope, the children's delight ? Is there any champion of home like the Strong Son of God ?

Did He not make the deaf to hear and the lame to walk ? How little we realise the home-values of those statements !

And then there is Christ's deeper work still for the home, at which I have only so far hinted. His miracles of Redeeming Grace have re-made millions of human homes. It is He Who has sought the prodigal son and daughter in the far country and *sent them home*, in every generation. It is His pure white ethic for man and woman that has been increasingly the bulwark of domestic happiness ever since He spoke it. It is His love for the children that has restored to the human home, and to the State, their true objective ; it has been His perfect revelation of the infinite value in God's sight of every living soul that has given to woman her rightful place in man's regard.

Jesus then is the supreme Home-maker of history. All His teaching reflects His reverence for the home. Christianity is peculiarly a domestic religion, and that is why it is the

most universal. Its name for God is Father, its name for man is Brother, its watchword is Love, its aim a perfect Fellowship, a family of God.

Bearing this in mind, let us see how Jesus speaks of—

The Future Life

Jesus tells us little, but what He tells us is enough. He does not trouble us with detail, but He reveals the essential spirit of that other life. He throws all His emphasis upon the fact there of fellowship. He depicts the future life *in terms of Home*. Listen! “God is not a God of the dead, but of the living, *for all live unto Him.*” “*In My Father's House* are many rooms, I go to prepare a place for you, that *where I am there ye may be also.*” “Father, I will that those whom Thou has given Me *be with Me where I am.*”

In the story of the Transfiguration we have the centuries and generations meeting in the diviner life. Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus—a fact eloquent of the perfection of heaven's fellowship and family life. Christ's most beautiful parable, that of the “one

stray sheep and the shepherd searching " is a sure indication that the divine love is of that perfect quality which will not relinquish one of its offspring. It is impossible to conceive a purer or more passionate love than Christ revealed.

The Divine Champion of Home will make Home yonder as He made home here.

Problems of Reunion

But there are certain difficulties regarding details that spoil our whole-hearted acceptance of the truth.

It is foolish of us to be troubled about these details rather than to give ourselves up to the delight of His sure promise. Whatever awaits us, we may be quite sure, such is His love as we have already known it, that " eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for them that love Him."

It is very doubtful whether, trained as we are so exclusively almost for this earth-sphere, we can ever anticipate the actual environment that will be ours in another world. Yet there is nothing to forbid our

trying, and certain fears at least we may set at rest as altogether unworthy and unreasonable.

1. *There is the problem of recognition.* We may say concerning this, that it is very unlikely that there is only an accidental relation existing between our soul and body in this sphere. It is much more likely that there is the closest and most inevitable relation between them. Our bodies are built, doubtless, to the requirements of our souls, and, the "life" that is in us rebuilds the soul's tenement completely once every seven years.

God then, Who hath given us body after body thus, can be trusted to supply whatever need of that kind the future holds. The probability is strong that St. Paul's views in 1 Corinthians xv. present the truth of the matter.¹

What we constantly forget in this regard is that it is not ourselves only who will be looking out for our loved ones, but *they also* who will be looking for our coming, and whilst we may be inexperienced in the new environment they will be quite used to it. When

¹ See Essay on "Resurrection of the Body."

we were born into this world, we did not at first recognise those who stood nearest us in life and love, but *with their aid* we gradually awoke to the possession of our "heritage of joy."

So do I picture the "great change" we call death. Has not Jesus promised us a "prepared place?" It may not this time be a cradle, but, be assured, it will be a "home circle." We insist upon investing death with all the chill of "loneliness," thinking only of the human society the traveller is leaving, we forget the human society, not to speak of the divine, to which he journeys. We are no lonelier, depend upon it, in death than we are in birth, but attended by the ministering hands of those who have gone before. Man travels, at any time, but a little part of his great pilgrimage *alone*, mostly he travels in company, for the instinct for home was breathed into his being with the first divine breath of life.

Furthermore, we must not forget that there are spiritual methods of recognition as well as physical. Have you never been sensible of some one's presence in a room before actually seeing the person? Where

there is a will there is a way, and love will always find it. As the poet makes Prince Arthur say to his mother, Constance, on their meeting in heaven:

It was not, mother, that I knew thy face,
The luminous eclipse that's on it now,
Though it was fair on earth, did make it strange
E'en to me, who *loved* as well as knew thee ;
It was *my heart* that cried out, "Mother."

2. *There is the problem of development in the future life.* The mother who loses her child wants to find her child a child still in the life to come. Yet the clock cannot be stayed on earth ; can it be stayed in heaven ? Is heaven's life static, a vast stagnation of being ? But if not, and the child grows man or woman, what then of recognition ? Besides, to grow in heaven ! Will not that mean a development of character and being which will carry the child far beyond the humble little earth-mother who once claimed him as her own ? The problem is full of pathos, and does not admit of any answer that is entirely without pain, but certain things should be obvious.

Heaven's Life not Stationary

We simply cannot imagine heaven's life static. A little child stunted for ever to a child's condition is simply a monstrosity. There must be development of a kind. And if the mother questions her heart closely she will find that, much as she would love to keep her baby always a baby, yet she would not have it miss the richer joy of youth and development. The mother in India who has to send her child to England to be educated would receive a great shock to find no change after several years, whereas she looks with pride upon the grown lad or girl who takes the place of the little babe she once knew.

The fact is that in all true developments of human life there is at every stage a richer beauty that amply compensates for all that passes away to make room for it.

If Love rules, and that means if Christ rules, in these two hearts thus separated, however far they may eventually be from each other in knowledge and attainment of any kind, Love's delight will be in the bridging of the gulf and in the sharing of all the wealth of life. Your boy, educated in the Better

Land, will not air his knowledge to your confusion, little mother, or overawe you with his angelic splendour, but there shall occur that which Tennyson so beautifully describes in "In Memoriam," when he says :

For what delights can equal those
That stir the spirit's inmost deeps,
When one who *loves* and *knows not* reaps
A truth from one who *loves* and *knows*.

So

There is a Tryst to Keep

God has not grouped us here in families by accident. We are permanent travelling companions across the Eternities. When folk ask me how they shall meet yonder amongst the millions of a larger world, I ask them how they managed to meet here amid millions on earth ? See ! here are two lives growing up in differing circumstances hundreds of miles apart, and yet slowly and surely they come closer and closer together, barrier after barrier of circumstance breaking down for their mutual approach, all things conspiring to place them at last side by side at the altar of God ! Who brought them together ? God. Can you not trust Him to renew what He once

formed ? If He calls the dear one from your side for a time, it is only to give him back to you again in a *fellowship richer and holier for the separation*.

So you have a tryst to keep. You know with whom. How do you stand for keeping it ? It is not a matter of place primarily, is it ? It is much more a matter of moral worth and spiritual purity. Are you fit to stand in those shining presences "with the spirits of just men made perfect" ? We all have one tryst at least to keep, and that the most sacred of all—with Him Who has gone to prepare a place for us ! Are you ready to keep tryst with Him ?

Oh ! the way sometimes is low
 And the waters dark and deep,
 And I stumble as I go,
 But I have a tryst to keep ;
 It was plighted long ago
 With some who lie asleep.

And though days go dragging slow,
 And the sad hours gravewards creep,
 And the world is hushed in woe ;
 I neither wail nor weep,
 For *He* would not have it so,
 And I have a tryst to keep.

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